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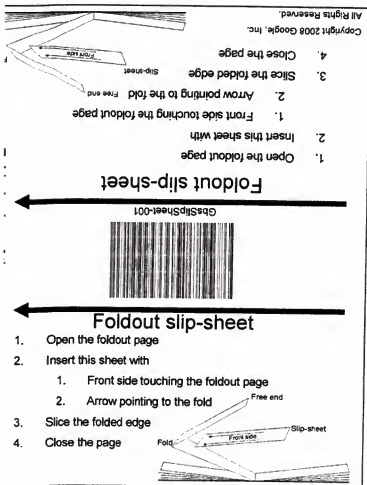
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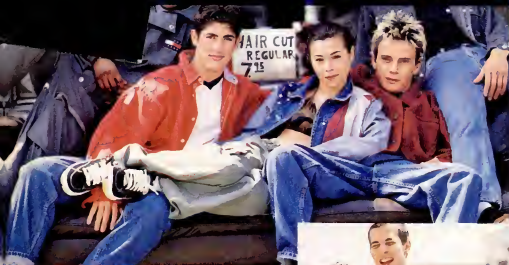
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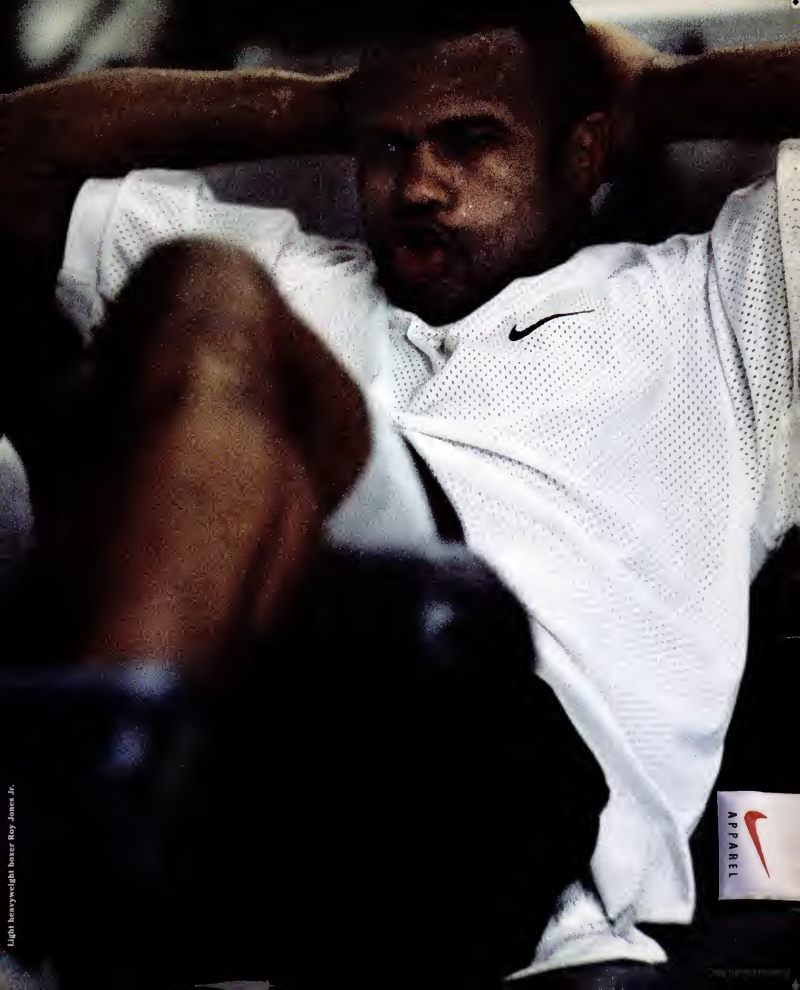
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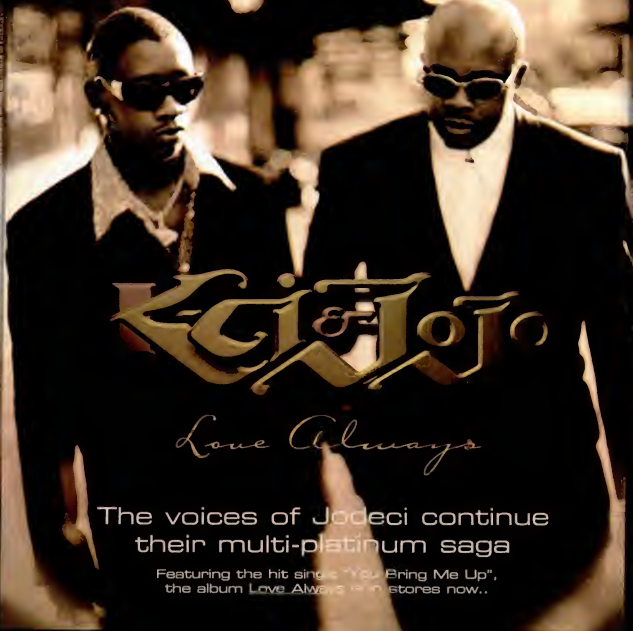
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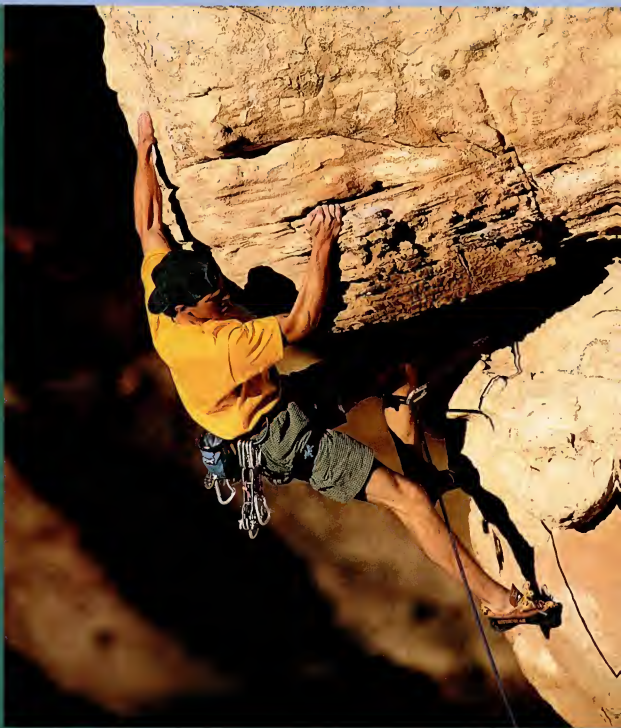


KHAKIS FOR MEN



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In the battle against HIV,



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* IHS America, 3/96 - 3/97

If you're HIV+, you know the feeling.

You're at war with an unseen and dangerous enemy. Everything's at stake — your health, your peace of mind, and your expectations for the future.

It's time to strengthen your attack.

Viral load testing, now available from your doctor, identifies the amount of active virus in your body — and is considered to be an important indicator of disease progression, together with CD4 T-cell counts. The best way to reduce the build-up of HIV is to maintain a low viral load.



there's a change in outlook.

CRIXIVAN significantly decreases viral load in many patients.

CRIXIVAN provides powerful HIV suppression through protease inhibition. In some patients, CRIXIVAN has lowered the amount of HIV in the bloodstream to levels undetectable by available testing. (Note: The clinical significance of changes in serum viral RNA measurements during treatment with CRIXIVAN has not been established. Also, the virus may still be present in other organ systems.)

CRIXIVAN also increases CD4 T-cell levels in many patients.

With less virus to repel, the immune system produces more disease fighting CD4 T-cells.

CRIXIVAN is generally well tolerated and is currently the most widely prescribed* protease inhibitor medication.

Some patients treated with CRIXIVAN in clinical trials developed kidney stones. This occurred in about 4% of patients. Since CRIXIVAN has been marketed, other side effects have been reported, including rapid breakdown of red blood cells and kidney stones sometimes with kidney failure. Drinking at least 6 glasses of liquid each day may help reduce the chances of forming a kidney stone. In some patients with hemophilia, increased bleeding has been associated with protease inhibition treatments. Also, there are some common medications and some AIDS-related medications you should not take with CRIXIVAN. Make sure your healthcare provider knows about all medications you are taking or plan to take.

Every day is an opportunity to fight back.

Educate yourself with knowledge about nutrition, fitness, and treatment developments that can help you lighten your load and manage the virus.

Important Considerations: CRIXIVAN is a protease inhibitor that is indicated for the treatment of HIV infection in adults when antiretroviral therapy is warranted. It is not a cure for HIV or AIDS. People taking CRIXIVAN may still develop infections or other conditions associated with HIV. Therefore, it is very important for you to remain under the care of a doctor. It is not yet known whether taking CRIXIVAN will extend your life or reduce your chances of getting other illnesses associated with HIV. Information about how well the drug works is available from clinical studies up to 24 weeks.

For additional information on CRIXIVAN, please read the patient package insert provided on the following page of this ad.

Remember to ask your doctor about CRIXIVAN.

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**Patient Information about CRIVIAN (KRIV-sih-van)
for HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) Infection**
Generic name: indinavir (in-DIH-nuh-veer) sulfate



Please read this information before you start taking CRIVIAN. Also, you should read the information included with CRIVIAN each time you receive your prescription, just in case any changes happen. Remember, the information does not take the place of careful discussions with your doctor. You and your doctor should discuss CRIVIAN when you start taking your medication and at regular checkups. You should remain under a doctor's care when using CRIVIAN and should not change or stop treatment without first talking with your doctor.

What is CRIVIAN?

CRIVIAN is an oral capsule used for the treatment of adults with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) when therapy is warranted. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). CRIVIAN is a new type of HIV drug called a protease (PR0-tee-see) inhibitor.

How does CRIVIAN work?

CRIVIAN is a protease inhibitor that fights HIV. It may help lower the amount of HIV in your body (called "viral load") and raise your CD4 (T) cell count.

CRIVIAN may be prescribed alone. CRIVIAN may also be prescribed with other anti-HIV drugs such as AZV (also called AZT), 3TC, ddC, or ddI. CRIVIAN works differently from these other anti-HIV drugs. Talk with your doctor to see if you should take CRIVIAN alone or with other anti-HIV drugs.

CRIVIAN has been studied in adults. It has not been studied in children and adolescents.

How should I take CRIVIAN?

There are six important things you must do to help you benefit from CRIVIAN:

- 1. Take CRIVIAN capsules every day as prescribed by your doctor.** Continue taking CRIVIAN unless your doctor tells you to stop. Take the exact amount of CRIVIAN that your doctor tells you to take, right from the very start. To help make sure you will benefit from CRIVIAN, you must not skip doses or take "drug holidays." If you don't take CRIVIAN as prescribed, the activity of CRIVIAN may be reduced (due to resistance).
- 2. Take CRIVIAN capsules every 8 hours around the clock, every day.** It may be easier to remember to take CRIVIAN if you take it at the same time every day. If you have questions about when to take CRIVIAN, your doctor or health care provider can help you decide what schedule works for you.
- 3. If you miss a dose by more than 2 hours, wait and then take the next dose at the regularly scheduled time.** However, if you miss a dose by less than 2 hours, take your missed dose immediately. If you then take your next dose at the regularly scheduled time, do not take more or less than the your prescribed dose of CRIVIAN at any one time.
- 4. Take CRIVIAN with water.** You can also take CRIVIAN with other beverages such as skim milk, juice, coffee, or tea.
- 5. Ideally, take each dose of CRIVIAN without food but with water at least one hour before or two hours after a meal.** Or you can take CRIVIAN with a light meal. Examples of light meals include:
 - dry toast with jelly, juice, and coffee with skim milk and sugar (if you want)
 - corn flakes with skim milk and sugar

Do not take CRIVIAN at the same time as any meals that are high in calories, fat, and protein (for example - a bacon and egg breakfast). When taken at the same time as CRIVIAN, these foods can interfere with CRIVIAN being absorbed into your bloodstream and may lessen its effect.

6. Drink at least six 8-ounce glasses of liquids (preferably water) throughout the day, every day. CRIVIAN has caused kidney stones in some patients. By having enough fluids in your body you may help reduce the chances of forming a kidney stone. Call your doctor or the health care provider if you develop kidney pains (inside to lower stomach or back pain) or blood in the urine.

Does CRIVIAN cure HIV or AIDS?

CRIVIAN is not a cure for HIV or AIDS. People taking CRIVIAN may still develop infections or other conditions associated with HIV. Because of this, it is very important for you to remain under the care of a doctor. It is not yet known whether taking CRIVIAN will extend your life or reduce your chances of getting other illnesses associated with HIV. Information about how long the drug works is available from clinical studies up to 24 weeks.

Does CRIVIAN reduce the risk of passing HIV to others?

CRIVIAN has not been shown to reduce the risk of passing HIV to others through sexual contact or blood contamination.

Who should not take CRIVIAN?

Do not take CRIVIAN if you have had a serious allergic reaction to CRIVIAN or any of its components.

What other medical problems or conditions should I discuss with my doctor?

Talk to your doctor if:

- You are pregnant or if you become pregnant while you are taking CRIVIAN. We do not yet know how CRIVIAN affects pregnant women or their developing babies.
- You are breast-feeding. You should stop breast-feeding if you are taking CRIVIAN.

Also talk to your doctor about:

- Problems with your liver, especially if you have mild or moderate liver disease caused by cirrhosis.
- Problems with your kidneys.
- Any medicines you are taking or plan to take, including non-prescription medicines.

This provides a summary of information about CRIVIAN. If you have any questions or concerns about either CRIVIAN or HIV, talk to your doctor.

Can CRIVIAN be taken with other medications?

Drugs you should not take with CRIVIAN:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| SELDANE® (terfenadine) | HEMISAL® (astemizole) | VERSED® (midazolam) |
| HALOON® (triazolam) | PROPLIS® (isipride) | |
- Taking CRIVIAN with the above medications could result in **serious or life-threatening** problems (such as irregular heartbeat or excessive sleepiness).
- In addition, you should not take CRIVIAN with rifampin, known as RIFADIN®, RIFAMATE®, RIFATER®, or RIMACTANE®.

Drugs you can take with CRIVIAN include:

- | | |
|---|--|
| RETROVIR® (zidovudine, ZDV also called AZT) | BAOIN® (clarithromycin) |
| TAGAMET® (ranitidine) | isobond (H ₂) |
| DFLUCAN® (fluconazole) | ORTHO-NORPLAN 1/35® (oral contraceptive) |
| EPWIR® (amivivine) | ZERT® (stavudine, d4T) |
| BACTRIM®/SEPTRA® (trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole) | |
| VIDEX® (didanosine, ddI) — If you take CRIVIAN with VIDEX®, take them at least one hour apart. | |
| MYCOBUTIN® (rifabutin) — If you take CRIVIAN with MYCOBUTIN®, your doctor may adjust the dose of MYCOBUTIN. | |
| NIZORAL® (ketoconazole) — If you take CRIVIAN with NIZORAL®, your doctor may adjust the dose of CRIVIAN. | |

Talk to your doctor about any medications you are taking.

What are the possible side effects of CRIVIAN?

List all prescriptions you are taking. CRIVIAN can cause side effects. The following is not a complete list of side effects reported with CRIVIAN when taken either alone or with other anti-HIV drugs. Do not stop use of this side effects information about side effects. Your doctor can discuss with you a more complete list of side effects. Some patients treated with CRIVIAN in clinical studies developed kidney stones; this occurred in about 4% of patients. Drinking at least 6 glasses of liquid each day may help reduce the chances of forming a kidney stone. Call your doctor or the health care provider if you develop kidney pains (inside to lower stomach or back pain) or blood in the urine. Increases in bilirubin (one laboratory test of liver function) have been reported in approximately 10% of patients. Usually, this finding has not been associated with liver problems. However, on rare occasions, a person may develop yellowing of the skin and/or eyes.

In clinical studies, side effects occurred in 2% or more of patients included: abdominal pain, fatigue or weakness, flank pain, feeling unwell, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, acid regurgitation, loss of appetite, dry mouth, back pain, headache, trouble sleeping, dizziness, taste changes, rash, upper respiratory infection, dry skin, and nose throat.

Other side effects occurred in 0.5% to 2% of patients in clinical studies: muscle pain, muscle pain, leg pain, anxiety, depression, decreased skin sensation, tingling, and pain/numbness or difficulty urinating.

Side effects occurred rarely, in less than 0.5% of patients in clinical studies, and also considered serious, included: liver inflammation, liver cirrhosis, pneumonia, and swollen glands due to blocked urine flow.

Other side effects reported since CRIVIAN has been marketed include: liver problems including liver failure; kidney stones sometimes with kidney failure; rapid breakdown of red blood cells; abnormal swelling; and changes in skin color. In some patients with hemophilia, increased bleeding has been reported.

Tell your doctor promptly about these or any other unusual symptoms. If the condition persists or worsens, seek medical attention.

How should I store CRIVIAN capsules?

- Keep CRIVIAN capsules in the bottle they came in and at room temperature (59°-86°F).
- Keep CRIVIAN capsules away from light, keeping the small desiccant "pillow" in the bottle. Keep the bottle closed.

This medication is prescribed for a particular condition.

Do not use it for any other condition or give it to anybody else.

Keep CRIVIAN and all medicines out of the reach of children.

If you suspect that more than the prescribed dose of this

medication has been taken, contact your local poison control center or emergency room immediately.



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Capsules



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1. **Eligibility.** Contest is open to residents of the continental U.S., 17 years or older, except employees of Pro-Line Corporation, its affiliates, agents, distributors and retailers.

2. **How to Enter.** Print your name and address on an official entry form and mail with photo (no Polaroid's please. Photos will not be returned) and Comb-Thru box top to Comb-Thru Cut Above Contest, Pro-Line Hair Products, P.O. Box 223706, Dallas, Texas 75222. All entries become the property of Pro-Line Corporation and are not redeemable. All entries must be received and postmarked by October 5, 1997 and received no later than October 13, 1997.

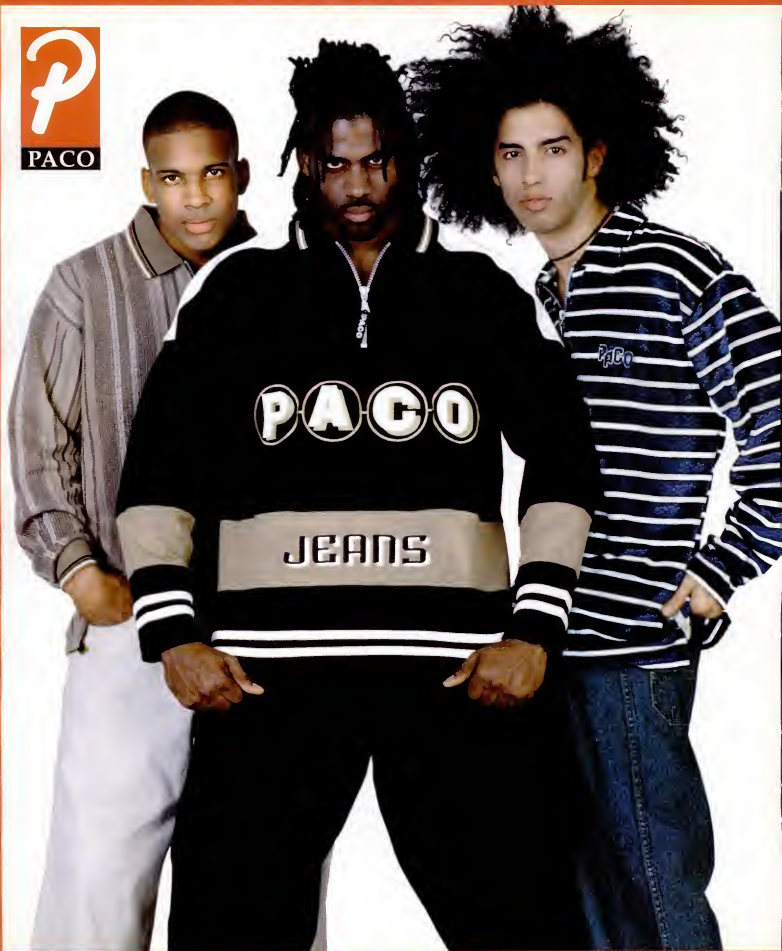
3. **Judging.** All valid entries will be judged on originality and creativity of styles and cuts. All decisions are final. Winner will be chosen on November 20, 1997.

4. **Prizes.** (1) Grand Prize Winner: \$2500 Cash, \$500 Shipping Space and an advertising contract with Pro-Line Corp. (1) First Prize Winner: \$1000 Cash and an advertising contract with Pro-Line Corp. (5) Second Prize Winners: \$250 Cash and an advertising contract with Pro-Line Corp. (150) Third Prize Winners: Cut Above Plus which includes Comb-Thru Sports Jersey & Shorts, Comb-Thru Baseball Cap, Set and Pro-Line Comb-Thru Products. Total Prize Value \$50,000.

5. **Agreement.** By submitting an entry, entrants agree to the official rules and that all entries concerned with this contest that not be liable for any injury, loss or damage whatsoever from the use and/or acceptance of any prize. Sponsor reserves the right to substitute prize of the value. Contest is subject to all federal, state, local laws and regulations. Void where prohibited, restricted or taxed. For a winner's list and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Pro-Line Cut Above Contest Winners List, P.O. Box 223706, Marketing Dept., Dallas, Texas 75222, postmarked by December 5, 1997 and received no later than December 15, 1997. **PARENT SIGNATURE REQUIRED FOR AGES 15-16.**



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POLO RALPH LAUREN

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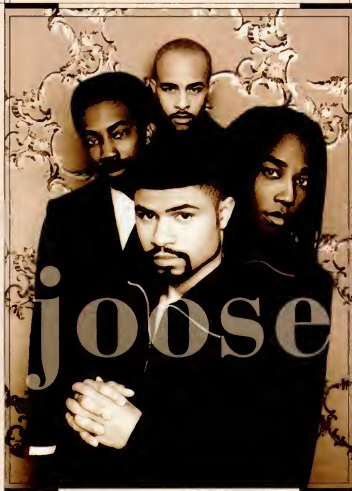
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CONTRIBUTORS

Barron Claiborne hung out with Erykah Badu minus the tea, incense, and candles—in his NYC. photography studio for "Soul Sister Number One" (page 82). "I just liked the way she looked and wanted to make a beautiful picture. I had never seen a picture of her that I liked," says the 30-year-old Boston native. "She reminds me of my little sister. She joked around a lot, like we were brother and sister." Claiborne has contributed to *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, and *Rolling Stone*.

Jeff Yang sat down with John Woo over Korean food for "Enter the Woo" (page 92). "Woo redefined action cinema for me and showed me the meaning of Asian brotherhood," says Yang. "He's managed to turn violence into a bizarre beat poetry." Yang, a Brooklyn native, is the founder and publisher of *A Magazine: Inside Asian America*. He is collaborating with Jackie Chan on the actor's autobiography, and is the coeditor of *Eastern Standard Time: A Guide to Asian Influence in Ameri-*



can Culture (Houghton Mifflin).

Phil Knott worked with two different extremes as he photographed both the Boot Camp Click ("Roll Call," page 102) and the Brand New Heavies (Clip, page 104). "Boot Camp were kind of wild and unruly. I just wanted to show their wildness," says the London-based photographer. "With the Brand New Heavies, it was a lot cleaner—more trying to make them look amazing." Knott has contributed to *Raygun*, *Interview*, *Dazed & Confused*, and *German Max*.

Karina Taira tried "to stay in the vein" of her usual upscale style for this month's fashion story ("Kabuki and Blue Jeans," page 110). "I'm not used to shooting casual clothes. I'm used to shooting high fashion," says the San Francisco native. "The image of jeans is always so slouchy and grungy. I tried to make it look more beautiful." Taira has worked with *German Vogue*, *Italian America*, *Korean Harper's Bazaar*, *Pttna*, and *Madam* and has been featured in *American Photography*.

Writer-at-Large Greg Tate spoke with Erykah Badu for this month's cover story. He also contributes our Black-Owned and Real Music columns....Soccer player Jerome Albertini, who represents for a New York club team, was on familiar turf when he photographed "Just For Kicks" (page 118), the style story on soccer apparel. He has worked for *Raygun*, *Details*, *Visionaire*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Trace*....VIBE research editor David Bry wrote "Ascension" (page 106), which explores the history and congregation of San Francisco's St. John Coltrane African Orthodox Church. He wrote the lead music review on Scarface in our last issue....Erin Patrice O'Brien caught on camera some clowns from UniverSOUl Big Top Circus—the world's only all-black circus—for this month's photo essay, "Big Top" (page 98). She has photographed the likes of Mercedes Ladies, Hurricane G, and Nancy Reagan....Minya Oh wrote several Start pieces in this issue. She also does the Shoot column each month and has contributed to *The Source*, *ego trip*, and *Pulse!*

MARTIN LAWRENCE

TIM ROBBINS

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LIFE AFTER DEATH

Out of all the articles on Biggie and his last days, yours was the best ["Chronicle of a Death Foretold," by Cheo Hodari Coker, May]. It's a shame that another talented young black man has left us. I have always been a tremendous Biggie fan; but after reading this article, I now have a genuine love for him. He was very positive and took whatever life offered. He seemed like a good brother whom you'd love to have around. I would like to send my condolences to Biggie's family and friends. I feel like we've lost another warrior fighting for urban America.

Ronita
Chicago, IL

My coworkers and I were totally disappointed with the May issue of VIBE! You dedicated this issue to the memory of the Notorious B.I.G., the King of New York, yet played him out at the same time. I don't understand how you can consider your coverage a dedication. Where's the love? Please correct me if I am wrong, but you used more ink when covering the East vs. West nonsense! You also hit "Pac off with a 10-page detailed article on his murder investigation. The Wallace Family has my deepest sympathy. Big Poppa, rest in peace!"

Sabod Godbolt
Plainfield, NJ

I was deeply disappointed by your lackluster coverage of Biggie's death. It left a lot to be desired. I realize his career was a very short one; but a chronicle of his life, career accomplishments, interviews, and photos would have been greatly appreciated by his fans. This is the least you could have done, especially since VIBE

helped to perpetuate the negative hype that is partly responsible for this tragic event.

Dave Harris
Raleigh, NC

WHO SHOT YA?

Props to Rob Marriott, because he is the only reporter out there who's telling the truth about Sex Knight ["All That Glitters," May]. Suge has been the one promoting the whole East vs. West nonsense

explore my sexuality with. My family doesn't like to hear about this, which is why I'm glad we have voices like Mc'Shell's to speak to those who are lacking role models. I've been so outspoken about my curiosity that my former coworkers have admitted they'd indulge if the price was right. I know I had everything to do with their confessions. Most of us even want to visit female strip joints, and we were

stars ["Sexy MFs," by Robert Morales, May]. These people live a prurient existence, glorifying the dark pleasures of life, using their precious bodies to attain money and fleeting stardom. What's the positive message? Notoriety? Glamour? What's positive about repeated anal intercourse and unprotected sex? Would a promiscuous teen with low self-esteem benefit after reading such an article? I think not. Although much of your journalism savvy entails trying to "keep it real" and exercising your rights under the First Amendment, it comes across as raw, sometimes blatant, vulgarity. Perhaps it is for the shock appeal or just written entertainment, but your magazine serves an immense following of young minds and eager talent desperate to break into the music industry.

Genie Griffin
Newark, DE

I work at the Lusty Lady exotic dance theater in San Francisco (we just unionized with the Service Employees International Union Local 790, becoming the only unionized strip club in the country). I was really pleased with your story on porn stars. I was excited that the article was not

"If we lived in a perfect world, gay folks could exist without being criticized, ostracized, beaten, and made to feel ashamed of their sexuality."

from the beginning. Puffy, on the other hand, always promoted peace. Say what I like about Puffy, but I bet Biggie didn't die broke!

André Taylor
Boston, MA

all surprised by that fact. One day I will scratch that itch, but, until then, I'll take Mc'Shell's advice and just "relax...everything is not in haste."

Buttaphy
Detroit, MI

PEACE BEYOND PASSION

After reading the sensational conversation with Mc'Shell NdegéOcello ["Have No Fear," by Rebecca Walker, May], I have much respect for her as a unique, talented artist. Some women, like myself, would not admit to enjoying sex for fear of being perceived as promiscuous. But Ms. NdegéOcello evened the score by openly and comfortably admitting to enjoying sex with men and women, and acknowledging the fact that it's okay to be honest with yourself and others. I dug that quality in her.

Byan Shores
Long Beach, CA

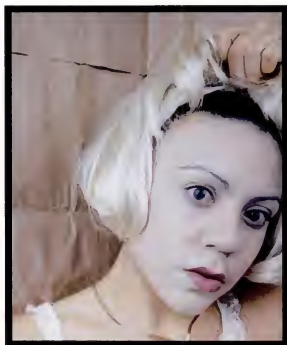
I was blown away by your interview with Mc'Shell NdegéOcello. Her honesty about her lesbian experiences was filled with humor, and I enjoyed getting a glimpse into the other side. I'm bi-curious but haven't found anyone to

Mc'Shell's interview was both interesting and disgusting at the same time. How can a Muslim be a lesbian? There is no way on Allah's earth that can happen. It is against the religion of Islam to have a same-sex relationship. You're also supposed to be married in order to have a sexual relationship. You're supposed to cover your head and your body when you're not in the comfort of your own home. Mc'Shell exposed a whole lot of herself in your May issue. I hope Allah guides her in the right direction, because she has to choose between her lesbianism and her religion.

Fatimah Shabadah Muttakin
Philadelphia, PA

LOVE FOR SALE

I have always been known as a laid-back sort of mom-fair, open-minded, and intuitive—but I was disturbed when I read the article on the porno



YOUR BEST SHOT

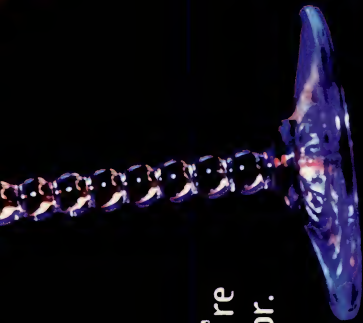
AYANNA QUINT, BERKELEY, CA

WALL

focused purely on sex and the "coolness" of being a porn star, but on the racism and working conditions many of these women and men face. Working in the sex industry is not about sex, it's a political labor issue. VIBE did a great job in making that distinction, since mainstream black magazines are often conservative when writing about sex. With the sex workers' movement well on the way, discussions about sex and working conditions are important—especially among people of color, whose ideas are silenced in main-



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stream society. Keep up the good work, and much love to the porn stars!

*Siobhan Brooks
San Francisco, CA*

LET'S TALK ABOUT HATE

As a 23-year-old, dedicated hip hop disciple who also happens to be gay, I was very offended by the comments made by Andre Benjamin in your roundtable discussion ["Let's Talk About Sex," by Rob Marriott and Karen R. Good, May]. Lately, there seems to be a lot of focus in hip hop on the gay community. Often we're not seen because we blend into the crowd, along with every other Tim-boot-wearin', baggy-jeans-saggin' brother in the place. The image of the gay man as an ass-twitching, limp-wristed sissy is as antiquated as the image of the black man as a lazy, shiftless, no-good nigga, and although there will always be those who live up to the negative stereotypes, they will never represent the majority.

Opinions such as Andre Benjamin's, that someone turns gay because everyone called him a sissy, are just outright ignorant. Why would anyone choose to be part of a society that is so highly degraded and ridiculed that it's not even safe to be publicly recognized? To Mr. Benjamin's dismay, gay people are not

just in gay clubs. We go to Magic City, the Snoopy Fox, and Club 112 too. We're not out to change the world, we just want to live our lives without the unnecessary crap. We already have enough to deal with. Everyone is always going to have an opinion; it's an inborn right. I just believe that if you're going to live by your opinion, it should at least be an informed one.

*Louis Turner
South Central, CA*

Andre Benjamin actually said, "If it was a perfect world, it wouldn't be no gay folks." On the contrary, if we indeed lived in a perfect world, gay folks could exist without being criticized, ostracized, beaten, and made to feel ashamed of their sexuality. Also, there would be openly gay rappers, as I am sure there are several closeted ones right now. What Mr. Benjamin fails to realize is that gay folks are everywhere within the music business. Unfortunately, the only ones he probably sees are the feminine ones. If Babylon created gays, then who created him? In Mr. Benjamin's perfect world, everyone would be like him. How sad! In a perfect world, it seems to me that everyone would be free to just BE.

*Gary M. Longstreet
Atlanta, GA*

Now, the entirety of the May issue of VIBE was "sexational," but one young lady really set a blaze all through my body! In the roundtable discussion, Ms. Nona Hendryx was all that plus a whole new world. I loved it when she said, "I cannot dismiss people based on their sex or race; I dismiss people based on how they treat me." Now that's a real woman. See, intellectual women with Nona's style and grace taught me about sex and how to please a woman. I can identify with her; I can feel her words, and, if I might add, she induced a very salacious feeling in my mind and heart.

*J.W. Ellis II
Abilene, TX*

PEEP THIS

As I began reading the list of entertainers' favorite movie sex scenes ["Between the Sheets," May], I was sure that my favorite would be among the most popular. To my surprise and horror, the bathtub scene from *Superfly* was not mentioned at all! While I'm sure my 36 years are showing, today's young homies are missing out if they haven't peeped this O.G. flick. Not only will they enjoy the finest soundtrack of all time from Curtis Mayfield, they'll see the title character, played by Ron O'Neal,

palm that ass in the soap suds to the strains of "Give Me Your Love!"

*Bo Sandine
North Bay Village, FL*

FILM NOIR

Ronald K. Armstrong wrote a letter criticizing Dr. Snakeskin's review of his movie [Letters, May], but he needs to realize that all too often black people produce substandard products and expect the black community to accept them simply because they were made by black people. If the movie was sorry, it was sorry. Hollywood may be hard on African-Americans, but we shouldn't be expected to go see a bad movie just because a black person made it. Continue telling it like it is, Dr. Snakeskin!

*N Smurve
Cincinnati, OH*

CORRECTIONS:

• The photo of Darius James in the Contributors section of the June /July issue was taken by Jennifer Livingston.

VIBE encourages mail and photographs from readers. Please send letters to VIBE MAIL, 214 Lexington Avenue, 8th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10016. Or send E-mail to vibe@vibe.com. Send photos to VIBE YOUR BEST SHOT (name address). Include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Photo submissions will become the property of VIBE and will not be returned.

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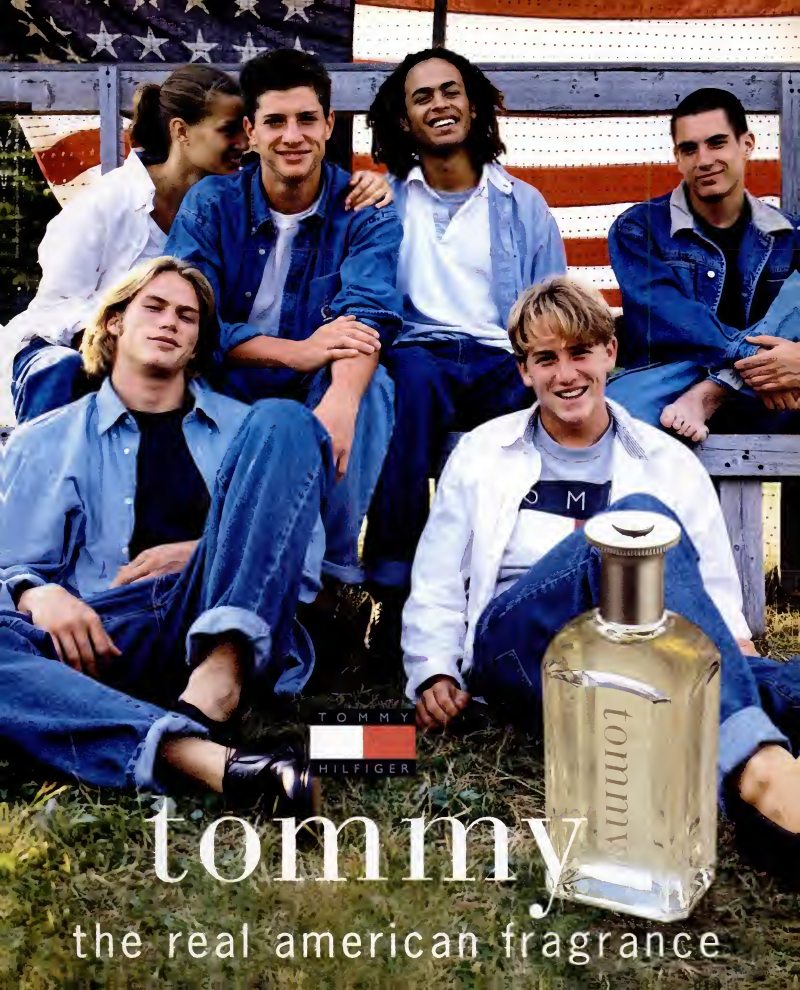
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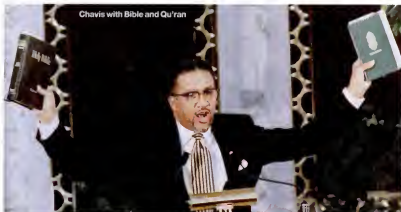
There's a conventional belief in America that says: If you have any black blood in you—that is, if at least one-eighth of your genetic make-up is black—then you're black. It doesn't matter if you're also East Indian, your grandmother Scottish, or your mom Latin. Just ask champion club-swingin' Tiger Woods: The youngest and first nonwhite person (his father is African-American; his mother is Thai) ever to win the coveted Masters title, Woods has been outspoken about his wish to be identified as multiracial. His public struggle to define himself for himself has added fuel to the recent debate over when to add a new "multiracial" box to the U.S. Census (presently, there are five categories) in the year 2000.

Opponents of the measure believe that since so many Americans have mixed racial backgrounds, those who've traditionally checked "black" or "Hispanic" may opt for the multiracial category, thereby diminishing the number of African-Americans and Hispanics recorded. This, critics say, could result in reduced funding for minority programs and undermine antidiscrimination laws.

Those who favor the measure, however, feel that a new category would adequately describe children of the one million-plus interracial couples (a number that has quadrupled since 1970)—rather than forcing them to choose one culture over another—and that racial statistics

won't be skewed drastically. "If this goes through, those of us who have always checked 'other' will now check 'multiracial,'" says one woman who's the product of an Asian mother and white father. "Just because there's a new box to check," she adds, "doesn't mean that we'll forget our identity."

The truth is, America's population is becoming more diverse every day. So attempting to squeeze people into five racial categories is futile. But while a new multiracial category may aid some in their quest for personal identity, it won't address the real issue—racism. And as a biracial person, I know that no box I check is going to tell me who I am. —*Andraia L. Duncan*



Brother Ben

Former NAACP head joins Nation of Islam

"When Cassius Clay first changed his name, it took people a while to get used to 'Muhammad Ali.' So says the Reverend Ben Chavis, who recently traded in his clerical collar for a bow tie and is now the Minister Benjamin Muhammad.

The preacher with the country-boy face—born 49 years ago as Benjamin Franklin Chavis—is hardly your everyday convert to the Nation of Islam. The civil rights luminary was unjustly imprisoned for four years as part of the Wilmington 10 case and coined the term "environmental racism" in 1982. He was named executive director of the NAACP, in 1993, but was axed 16 months later for secretly promising a \$300,000 settlement to a former aide who had sued him for sex discrimination. (He says the real reason was his alliances with Minister Louis Farrakhan and black nationalists.)

Chavis parlayed his friendship with Farrakhan into a role as organizer of the Million Man March. He joined the Nation this year on its February 23 Savior's Day holiday and immediately claimed a high-ranking job as Farrakhan's special assistant. But he dismisses talk that his conversion is a power move by a man in need of a platform. "My motive remains

singularly to help Minister Farrakhan, not to succeed him," he says. Yet his first assignment is high profile: conducting an 80-city National Revival Tour to support another march, this one including women and children, on October 16, 2000.

The new Minister, who was ordained as a Protestant minister in 1980, calls his spiritual change an "evolution." "Conversion would imply that what I was I am not anymore," he says. "But I am still a believer in the Bible and Jesus." Indeed, he's fighting to remain in the United Church of Christ (UCC). "I find no theological contradiction between being a black Christian and a black Muslim," he says. "I'm trying to exhibit a new paradigm for black leadership."

This paradigm won't be built easily: A UCC commission has recommended that he be defrocked. "It's hard for us to see how he could be both," said the UCC's Reverend Rollin Russell, a longtime Chavis colleague. "Like, we don't authorize anybody to be a minister and work at a Hindu temple."

Minister Muhammad, however, remains stalwart. "I was called into the ministry by God," he says. "The best way I can serve God is to help Minister Farrakhan."

Sonya Ross

Flavor for Days

VIBE puts Raekwon the Chef to the test

Everybody loves to eat, but not everyone knows how to cook. That said, I decided to ask the Wu-Tang Clan's Raekwon the Chef if he would take a break from his busy recording schedule to bless us with some culinary advice.

Matthew Lanes, head chef of SoHo's Gourmet Garage, provided us with the kitchen, aprons, wisdom, and some tasty mango salad. Raekwon selected whitefish as the entrée because he believes that red meat harbors "too much stuff [that will] clog up your arteries."

"We're gonna fry up some fish," he announced, gold teeth gleaming, "as if it were a Saturday mornin' and we was chillin', catin' fish and grits."

Don't sleep, he really can cook—his superbly spiced, deep-fried whitefish was delicious! But Raekwon says he got his chef title because of his rhyme flow. "If I was servin' you a plate of rhymes," he says, "you would eat them, 'cuz that's the shit you're tastin' right now." Rae has served up dinner for 30 at the Wu mansion, and he often cooks for the group when they're touring. He credits his mother for his skillset skills. He says that in the old days, his mom would



STELLA AGUIRRE

"sell dinners on the block for five dollars. [She'd hook up] a nice plate."

There's a philosophy behind Raekwon's kitchen magic: "When you're cooking, you automatically have to tell yourself, Yo, I'm not afraid to try new things or make mistakes. Ain't nobody gotta eat it if they don't want to." Can it all be so simple?

Andria M. Duncan

bullets point-blank news



• DOGGIN' THE BEAT

Snoop Doggy Dogg surprised L.A. radio station KGBT (92.3 the Beat) when he dissed it in a promo recorded for their rival, KPWR. Apparently, Snoop felt longtime supporter the Beat wasn't giving his single "The Vapors" appropriate airplay. "I was experiencing a head trip," says Snoop. "It just hurt me and made me trigger off." In response, the Beat officially banned Snoop from its playlists. After a few weeks, though, the matter was settled amicably. "We sat down and worked things out," says KGBT's Harold Austin.



• SHUCK-N-JIVE POP

Little Black Sambo is back and sweeter than ever. The Sambo character, complete with bare feet and tambourine, appears on the wrapper of the Sambapito whistling lollipop. But after the World Representatives of Every Continent (WREC) group brought the racist figure to the attention of Pathmark Stores, distribution was stopped. "The identification of symbols and images that are not life-enhancing must be a goal for all of us," says Alan J. Kurlander, CEO of distributor Hall of Fame Candy and Nuts who've since dropped the product.

A red Toyota Celica is parked in front of a building with posters. A woman in a white jacket is standing next to the car, and a man in a dark jacket is standing next to her. The car is a two-door coupe with a sleek design. The background features a building with posters on the wall.

just in case we ran into somebody we didn't feel like running into. But as we drove around listening to music on my **built-in CD* player**...I paid a little more for that...we got to thinkin' maybe we're best off right where we are. In my Sunfire. Besides, there's always tomorrow night.



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Death Keeps Knockin'

Crime-scene collectibles open new doors

Celebrity memorabilia has been known to fetch a high price, but how much would you pay for a souvenir commemorating the tragic slaying of the Notorious B.I.G. or Tupac Shakur? As tacky as it



seems, some people are eager to find out.

Corky Rice and Jerry Seimons, co-owners of Beverly Hills Budget Rent-a-Car, want to auction off the bullet-riddled car door of the green Suburban in which Biggie lost his life. The duo say they intend to donate the proceeds to the Challenger Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro L.A.

"Everybody's telling me that the door must have some value," Rice told the *L.A. Times*. "I'm trying to figure out how to turn this terrible incident into something good." The auction date, however, has been indefinitely postponed; a few days after the sales plans were announced, L.A. police repossessed the damaged door, saying they still needed it for evidence.

Meanwhile, rumors are circulating that the black BMW in which Tupac was fatally shot could also be on the auction block soon. Whiskey Pete's, a Nevada casino known for its Bonnie and Clyde memorabilia, says that someone claiming to be a Death Row Records representative recently called to see if it wanted to buy the shot-up Beemer. (Death Row, meanwhile, denies ever making such a call.)

While Whiskey Pete's has already spent more than \$300,000 on items like the car in which Bonnie and Clyde were killed and Clyde's bloody shirt, it passed on the offer. "The [Tupac] car just isn't a historic piece of America," says a casino spokesperson. "At least, not yet."

Minya Oh

bullets point-blank news



• WENDY'S WORLD! EXCELLENT!

N.Y.C.'s WQHT Hot 97 shock jock Wendy Williams could make her daytime TV debut this fall. Syndicated through Tribune Entertainment, a talk show called *Wendy's World* is being hyped as a "hipper version of *Rosie O'Donnell*." The New Jersey native made her mark on radio by dishing the dirt on rappers and singers, but Williams's small-screen gig will be different. "Our approach will be positive and lighthearted; we're not interested in gossip," says executive producer Herman Joseph Williams. "The television show is not the radio show." Keep an eye out for local listings.

Sound Check

Bobbito Garcia plays the tracks,
Abiodun Oyewole states the facts

The title of the latest album by the Last Poets, *Time Has Come*, is quite apt: their revolutionary creativity is as vital to our community and music now as it was 27 years ago when they first started kicking it. Abiodun unleashed a plethora of knowledge in the two hours we chatted. And fortunately, he's not out of touch with the people who can probably benefit from his wisdom the most—Abiodun has been a creative-writing consultant in the N.Y.C. public school system for 15 years.

• **Disasters**—"Small Time Hustler"

A.O.: I appreciate the message; it's confronting all the phony charades rappers play. I also appreciate that I can understand the lyrics—seems like some rappers get so caught up in delivery, they lose their substance.

B: Well, this song is from a different time zone, when clarity was the norm.

A.O.: The rhyme schemes now are more creative; there are a lot of triplets and quadruplets. Folks that really rocked me from that era were Eric B. & Rakim. Rakim was always deeper—plus his honesty was so right. He wrote poetry. We have a gift of communication, just as rich as Shakespeare. He wrote for his time; we write for ours.

• **Cheech & Chong**—"Basketball Jones Featuring Tyrone Shoelaces"

A.O.: Yes, I got a basketball Jones. I'm a fiend. I had a line in one of my poems about ball—"We need a team that will pass the pill so that when I don't have a shot my teammate will"—talking about the unity of black people. I played at Duke right after Willie Wise left. I played against Kareem in the playgrounds a couple of times when I was in high school. I know Julius Erving personally—he used to send me when I'd watch him play. The Doc, man! You don't sit down when he has the ball.

• **Manu Dibango**—"Soul Makossa"

A.O.: "Soul Makossa"—oh, please, this is a classic. You can play this anywhere in the world, and people will relate.

B: Do you dance?

A.O.: I love to, but I'm shy. I had a woman embarrass me once at a party. It was a slow record, and she tried to fuck me on the floor. Everybody thought she was my woman.

B: Ha-ha! She had you open!

A.O.: Yeah, so open I can't give up no more dances! But I can't help moving to the congas. Dancing is poetry in motion.

• **Nuyorican Soul Featuring Jocelyn Brown**—"I Am the Black Gold of the Sun"

A.O.: Sounds Brazilian, almost like Sergio Mendes. It has that Latin flavor, which is my favorite kind of music. I got mad love for the samba. I go into a trance. It's sensual, but you can feel unattached to life on Earth when you hear it. In the '60s, if you didn't have some connection to Puerto Rican folk in New York then you weren't connected, 'cuz the flavor was black and Puerto Rican. That's the real deal. My first three girlfriends were Puerto Rican.

• **Willie Perdomo**—"Nigger-Reccan Blues"

A.O.: I appreciate anything that peeks off the cover of madness. Black and Latino history is not about separation, it's about connection. We all suffer from the same oppression. It is a blessing to be black. We would have never tortured white folks, abused them, beat them, dragged them like they have done to us. It's not in our spirit. We are a loving, joyous people.

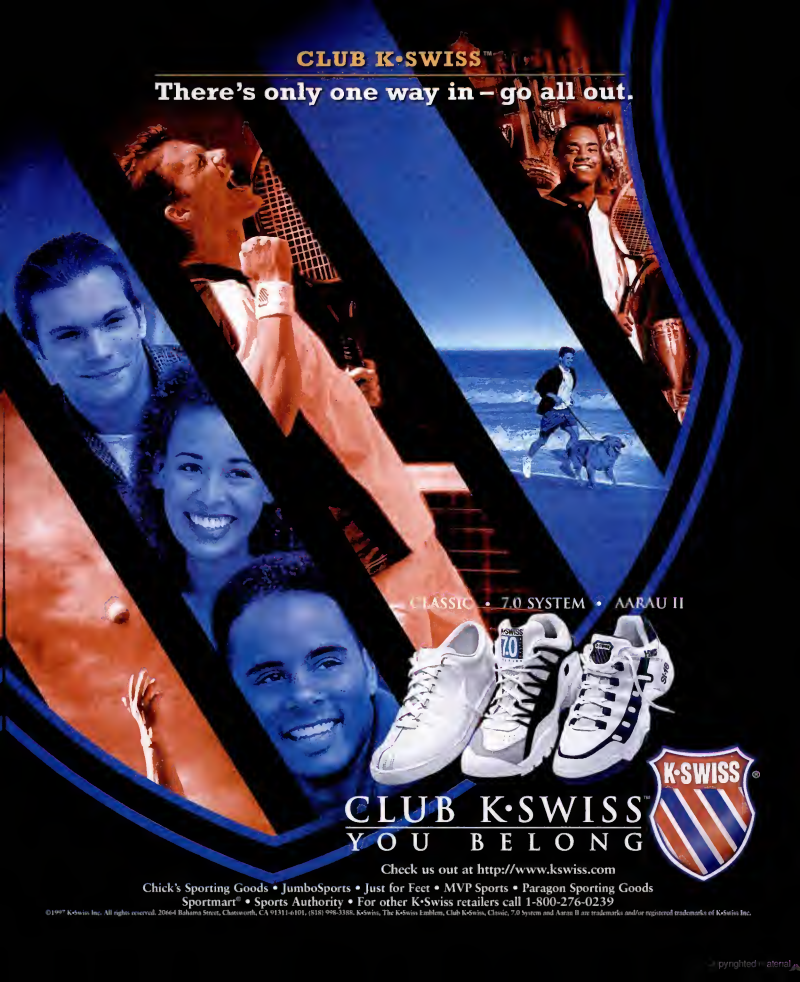


• EVERYBODY PLAYS THE FOOL

Former Blackstreet singer David Holister recently completed a tour with the gospel musical *A Fool and His Money*. But this story of a blue-collar family that wins a million dollars in a radio contest didn't exactly have the seven-year stage vet jumping out of his seat. "The play came while I was waiting for my record company [EMI] to be ready for me," says Holister, who drops a solo album this fall. "It was just something to pass the time."

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Word Is Bond?

PolyGram sued for discrimination

In the cutthroat corporate boys' club that is the music industry, there are very few female Big Willies—much less African-American ones—calling the shots. Lisa Cortés, former president of Loose Cannon Records, brought this fact to light in March when she filed a lawsuit against her former employer, PolyGram Records, charging it with race and sex discrimination.

After four years as a vice president at PolyGram-owned Mercury Records, Cortés made an agreement with PolyGram CEO Alain Levy, in 1994, that allowed her to start up her own imprint, Loose Cannon. This made her the only African-American woman president out of PolyGram's 15 U.S. label heads.

But last year, Cortés was informed that Loose Cannon—which saw minor success with dancehall artist Buju Banton and R&B



group Skin Deep—would be dissolved and that she would be let go. According to PolyGram spokeswoman Dawn Bridges, the reason was that Loose Cannon "consistently performed under expectations."

Cortés, 35, contends that PolyGram prevented her company from reaching its potential. "I was given the responsibility, liability, and accountability for Loose Cannon," she said in a press release. "But running an effective business

requires access to information, top-level meetings, and conferences. It requires support from the corporate structure. Label presidents who were white and male received this access and support. I did not." Bridges, who declined to discuss Cortés's specific claims, says that the lawsuit came as a surprise to PolyGram because "we feel that [Cortés] was treated very fairly."

"We have to stand up for our rights," says Cortés, who has since started her own management company. "One PolyGram ain't stoppin' my show." *Minya Oh*

Yo, YoYo

Advice from an intelligent black woman

I used to have a nice shape when I weighed 130 pounds (I'm currently 160 pounds). But I haven't lost any of the weight from my pregnancy, and I can't afford a gym. Help!

New York, NY

Dear L.W.,
Develop healthy eating habits by consulting a doctor and purchase a book on health and fitness. Also, there are a million things you can do without joining a gym, like calisthenics, dance classes, or swimming. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, or walk instead of taking the train or bus.

I have been sleeping with my coworker for a while now, and I really enjoy it. The catch is, I have a boyfriend who I've been dating for a year and a half. We plan to marry, but I really like my coworker a lot.

A.M.

New York, NY

Dear A.M.,
Girlfriend, if you love your boyfriend and you're engaged to be married, then you need to eliminate your coworker. Or maybe you should find the man that is already both of them rolled into one—he may be out there.

I am 16 years old and have an excessive eating problem: Every time I see food, I have to have it. Then I start feeling bad and end up depressed because I can't control it. What should I do?

Sonia

Pine Bluff, AR

Dear Sonia,
Speak to your parents about the problem and see a doctor immediately. It could be a thyroid condition. And act fast, because your eating habits could be doing irreparable damage to your body.

My mother is a substance abuser. She has had



this problem on and off for several years. I am a 17-year-old mother of a six-month-old baby, and I don't want my daughter to be raised in the same situation that I was. I still believe my mother can get sober, but I don't know what to do.

Springfield, MA

Dear L.W.,
Your first priority is to take care of your child, which means placing her in a healthy environment (maybe with a relative?). But you shouldn't neglect your mother either. She has a problem that can be fixed as long as she wants help. Contact Alcoholics Anonymous (413-532-2111) or Narcotics Anonymous (413-538-7479) for info on their programs.

How do you get the man to commit? Should I chase or be chased?

O.L.C.

Astoria, NY

Dear O.L.C.,
Men are so unpredictable—you'll never know for sure. I say it's better to be chased than chase a man. That way, you'll be positive he's interested.

Need some intelligent advice?

Write to: YO, YO, YO, c/o VIBE, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016
Please include return address and telephone number.

bullets point-blank news



• BUMP AND GRIND AND DUNK

On May 2, singer/producer R. Kelly became the first pop star to make the crossover to professional basketball rather than the other way around. The United States Basketball League's eight-week season allows Kelly to play for the Atlantic City Seagulls between studio sessions. "We're really happy for him," says a spokesperson from Jive Records. But does Kelly have the skills? "He's very talented," says team owner Ken Gross of the multiplatform guard who supplied two points in a 30-point opening game victory. "And he's improving everyday."



• HAMMER TIME (AGAIN)

First it was rap, now it's acting: MC Hammer is just too legit to quill! The former hunk is set to star in the tentatively titled *Connections*, a film about a washed-up rapper who helps a group of white kids organize a hip hop group to aid their unemployed mother. The movie, a Showtime Original Picture for Kids, is scheduled to air in August. "This is not a career-defining picture," says Hammer. "It's more about making a social statement than a career statement."

Ghost Faced

Do white rappers ever really fall off?

When Robert "Vanilla Ice" Van Winkle unleashed his 1990 smash hit "Ice, Ice Baby," white-skinned rappers rejoiced. Sure, the Beastie Boys and 3rd Bass had, by that time, sold classic albums to shopping-mall party people from Idaho to Iceland. But when Vanilla's sonic boom shots were heard, scores of bedroom guitarists—including ivory television stars David Faustino and Brian Austin Green—picked up two turntables and a microphone.

However, very few rappers of any hue can maintain their Big Willie status forever—everybody falls off. We all know the tragic tales of Afro rhyme twisters such as MC Hammer and King Sun (who's been on welfare), but where do Caucasian rappers land when they flop?

"I was more of like a Beck," says Jesse "Jaymes" Itzler, whose *Thirty Footin' in Your Face LP* (1991) served up frat-rap anthems such as "Shake It Like a White Girl" and "College Girls (Are Easy)." "But timing wasn't so good right after Vanilla Ice. I remember sitting on my couch, saying, Shoot this fuckin' guy [Vanilla Ice]."

Itzler, 28, didn't want to be just another novelty act. "Now I'm the house rather than the guy," he says. Fusing his love for sports and music, Itzler cofounded Alphabet City, an independent record label that specializes in compilations centered around pro and college teams. 1992's popular album and single *Go New York Go!*, for example, mix key audio moments in Knicks history—such as Willis Reed's herculean 1970 championship effort—with Kurtis Blow's ageless B-boy jam "Basketball." With 30 new releases slated for 1997, Jesse

Jesse Jaymes gettin' stupid



Jaymes is determined to stay in the game. Nike cofounder Phil Knight's son, MC Chilly Tee, just couldn't do it. "I was naive and idealistic," says Travis Knight, 23. His 1993 effort, *Get Off Mine* (MCA), enlisted the producing talents of the Bomb Squad but earned him a ticket straight to obscurity. "Rap is incredibly divisive. People are too worried what city you're from." Currently an undergraduate at Portland State University, Knight recently formed Ice-Cold, a music production company, in an effort to "steer local talent in the right direction."

Others refuse to throw away their microphones—despite obstacles. Although California's Jewish rap duo Blood of Abraham and New Jersey's Milkbone were dropped from their labels after one album, both are busy working on "hot" new demos. "There's a lot of young white kids that want to have somebody represent them," says Milk. "This time, I'm gonna come real." Scott Pollack

Studio Time

In the studio with

Queen Latifah

"It's like going to a hip hop school every time I record here," says Queen Latifah, laughing royally inside New York's Hit Factory, "because I always run into so many people." We're chilling in Studio A, and the room is crowded with friends, bodyguards, and aspiring rappers.

For her fourth full-length offering, tentatively titled *Evolution*, Latifah has enlisted the production prowess of Clark Kent, Sean "Puffy" Combs, and banger newcomer Big Baby, who composed the music for the Faith Evans-penned "It's Alright."

"On that song, I'm mostly singing, and Faith does the backgrounds," says the versatile MC. "Hopefully, we're going to get L.L. to put a rap there."

Latifah takes a break from her late-night session to parody with one of the other production teams responsible for the album's blazing beats—the Track Masters (a.k.a. Tone and Poke). They quietly listen to a playback of their cut. "Me and Poke are trying to create a club joint that everybody can bounce to," says Tone as the track rips from the speakers. "LaLa hasn't had a slamming club song in a while, so we're trying to make this one as up-tempo as possible."

"On this disc, there will be some songs that will make you think," says Latifah. "But for the most part, we're trying to have a good time. There's been a lot of depressing incidents in hip hop lately, and I think right now we need to feel good about our music."

As her manager, Shakim Compere, walks over to discuss important last-minute business, Latifah slides the Clark Kent-produced

"No/Yes into the DAT player. "This song is about the dos and don'ts of sexuality," she explains. "Like, when your body is telling you yes, but your mind is telling you no."

"I was seventeen when I recorded my first single," reflects Latifah. "Now I'm twenty-seven. I've grown as a person and as an artist. I want to prove that I'm not afraid to try new things."

Michael A. Gonzales



start

bullets point-blank news

BERRY MUCH YOUNGER

Actress Halle Berry seems to be having a hard time finding a male costar her own age. After appearing with AARP candidate Martin Landau in *B.A.P.S.* last spring, the Revlon girl will play opposite sexagenarian Warren Beatty in the upcoming 20th Century Fox political thriller *Bullworth*. Berry, who strutted newly acquired rhyming skills during a March guest spot on *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, portrays a streetwise Berkeley grad who becomes entangled with U.S. Senator Beatty. Apparently, Strom Thurmond wasn't available.



SHOOK CHEFS?

Puffy Combs's newest venture, Justin's Bar & Restaurant—named after the Bad Boy CEO's son—opens in July on West 21st Street in Manhattan. According to the *New York Post*, though, Puffy's proximity to recent violent scenes has scared away his top culinary talent. "Not true," says Joseph Cabello, general manager of the soul food eatery. "We've had a tremendous response from chefs, but it's a painstaking process to find the right one." Maybe they oughta give Raekwon a call.



PE TV

Fox hires Chuck D as a news reporter



For all y'all sick of watching Channel Zero, hope has finally arrived. Chuck D is taking over the mainstream airwaves, courtesy of the Fox News Channel.

The Public Enemy frontman is a new correspondent for FNC, a cable channel launched in October 1996 as a competitor to CNN and now available in 21 million homes nationwide. In addition to providing commentary and street reporting, Chuck will have the opportunity to develop his own feature stories.

"The most racist frontier on television is news, so I'm trying to make a first step and actually make a difference," Chuck said on the cellular from Philadelphia, where he was working on his first story, a follow-up to the presidential summit hosted by Oprah Winfrey. "This is a righteous way of making sure we're able to balance out certain perceptions and perspectives on news."

John Moody, an FNC vice president, hired Chuck after the rapper dropped wisdom during a guest appearance on Fox News Sunday. He promises that Chuck will be unleashed on the public in all his militant B-boy glory—baseball caps, sweat-shirts, the whole nine yards.

"Will we let Chuck be Chuck?" asks Moody. "I think we'd be in trouble if we tried to stop him." *Jesse Washington*

Etc....Etc....Etc.....

Sallin' on: A funny thing happened to funnyman freestyler Biz Markie the other day while he was driving through the streets of Harlem, N.Y. Apparently, the boys in blue wanted to have a few words with the Biz, so they pulled him over. Get this—homeboy had no identification, and his license had been suspended 19 times. But the one valid license the Biz did have was his boating license. Ooops!...Hip hope: Fugee mother-to-be Lauryn Hill recently stepped away from her native New Jersey and jetted out to war-torn Zaire armed with a message of love. And although Hill wasn't able to enter the troubled nation, she did go to Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania and met with some Zairian refugees....Wright brother?: Scarface, who suffers from chronic flight-o-phobia and usually travels by bus, has finally agreed to step aboard an airplane. "Face is set to earn his wings by touring Europe this summer....Dog eat dog: The remains of one of superwoman Halle Berry's two beloved Maltese dogs was found near her home in the Hollywood Hills. The pet—her companion for 12 years—had an unfortunate run-in with a wily coyote.



Word to the Wizard

VIBE's version of Oz may make you say "Ho"

Homegirl Roseanne just wrapped a new stage version of *The Wizard of Oz*. But the real heads in Dorothy's native Kansas want the story told with some hip hop flava. So VIBE held a casting call with full support from the Mayor of Munchkinland. Peep how it went down:

- 1) Lauryn Hill as Dorothy. Ready or not, here comes her house.
- 2) Rage as Wicked Witch of the West. Pullin' a hood ride down the yellow brick road, fool!
- 3) Spice 1 as the Tin Man. "Cuz a 'Nigga Gots No Heart.'"
- 4) Coolio as the Scarecrow. If he only had a brain.
- 5) DJ Yella as the Cowardly Lion. Self-explanatory, sucker.
- 6) Tim Dog as Toto. Lions and tigers and bears....and Tim Dog. Oh, my!
- 7) Rakim as the Wizard of Oz. On the D.L., the R's got shit locked in the Emerald City.

Stick and Move

Jeru gets damaged

Jeru the Damaja was wounded during a sold-out April 9 concert at Boulder, Colo.'s Fox Theatre. According to the rapper, an unidentified assailant slashed his arm, which required 13 stitches at a local hospital.

The incident took place midway through Jeru's show, when a local Caucasian MC, known as African Sam, challenged Jeru to a freestyle battle. The Damaja accepted and quickly won the duel, but Sam (who couldn't be reached for comment) refused to leave the stage or give up the microphone. When Jeru tried to retrieve the mike, Sam pulled back on it and wound up hitting himself in the mouth. Sam then reacted by taking a swing at Jeru, who retaliated with a flurry of punches. At that point,

all hell broke loose.

"My whole thing was just to keep the stage clear, because if you didn't belong on the stage, you were *getting it*," Jeru says. "I was throwing blows when apparently one of the guys swung something at me. And as my fist went out, I got cut." No weapons were found, and no arrests were made.

Jeru, who calls the wound "baby stuf," is sure that he was sliced by a razor blade. He has no plans, however, to press charges. "We're still about peace and love," he says. "But how can you stand for peace and love if people are going to be able to just take you out? If I'm trying to uphold something, I have to be able to hold it down." *Michael Roberts*



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In the MIX It's All Love

start

1. Hip hoppers Cee-Lo of Goodie MOB and Common crash at Sears in Chicago. There's something angelic about the sight of Cee-Lo resting against soft floral sheets. 2. How ironic is it that Puffy's son, Justin, is holding a plastic gun on the set of the Lox video "We'll Always Love Big Poppa"? Puffy should know better by now. Haven't we learned anything? (3.) What they say about expectant mothers must be true because Lauryn Hill was glowing on the video set. Could she be loved? (4.) Faith and Christopher "Little Biggie" Wallace Jr. were both in good spirits as mad spirits came out to show their love for the Notorious B.I.G. (5.) A name change may soon be necessary for Fat Joe if he keeps losing weight. Hopefully, he won't pull a Janet Jackson on us and start rocking the incredibly tight gear. 6. On the video set of his single "Anythin' Can Happen," Wyclef fell off his roller skates. But he did pretty well considering it was his first time on them. 7. DJ Shadow recently gave a hype performance at N.Y.C.'s Tramps. (8.) Hmm, ya think Jeru is taking his prophet role a little too far? The cape isn't even the problem, it's the no-shirt thing. He also rocked the crowd at Tramps. 9. At the Impact convention in Miami, Montell Jordan gave a smooth, heartfelt performance. 10. Was it really necessary for Wesley Snipes and his girlfriend, Donna, to wear sunglasses inside the Bruin Theater in Westwood for the premiere of *Murder at 1600*? Some people are simply too cool to understand. 11. He may be Jay-Z's business partner, but Damon Dash's sense of style is slightly unsettling on the set of Jay's "Who Ya Wit" video from the *Sprung* soundtrack. He looks like a pimp who's gone mad. 12. Camp Lo are all about hanging on to the '70s. That's why BernNadette Stanis, better known as Thelma from *Good Times*, is still the woman of their dreams. She's a guest star in their new video, "Black Nostaljack."

Shani Saxon



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i have fantasies about...

baseball.

Sometimes I fantasize that I'm a pitcher who has a rocket-arm.
And my nickname is "Rocket-Arm Pitcher."

I'm also dressed up as a
big green pickle. Probably 'cause
that's what we're always in when I'm pitching
— a pickle.

And I have a little dipping cup of
hot mustard hanging on my belt.

I have no idea what **that** symbolizes.

That's just one of my fantasies though.
I have another one that's even better
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'Cause how else are you going to meet
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some don't. Just something to consider before you get one of these with your Stuff Prints.

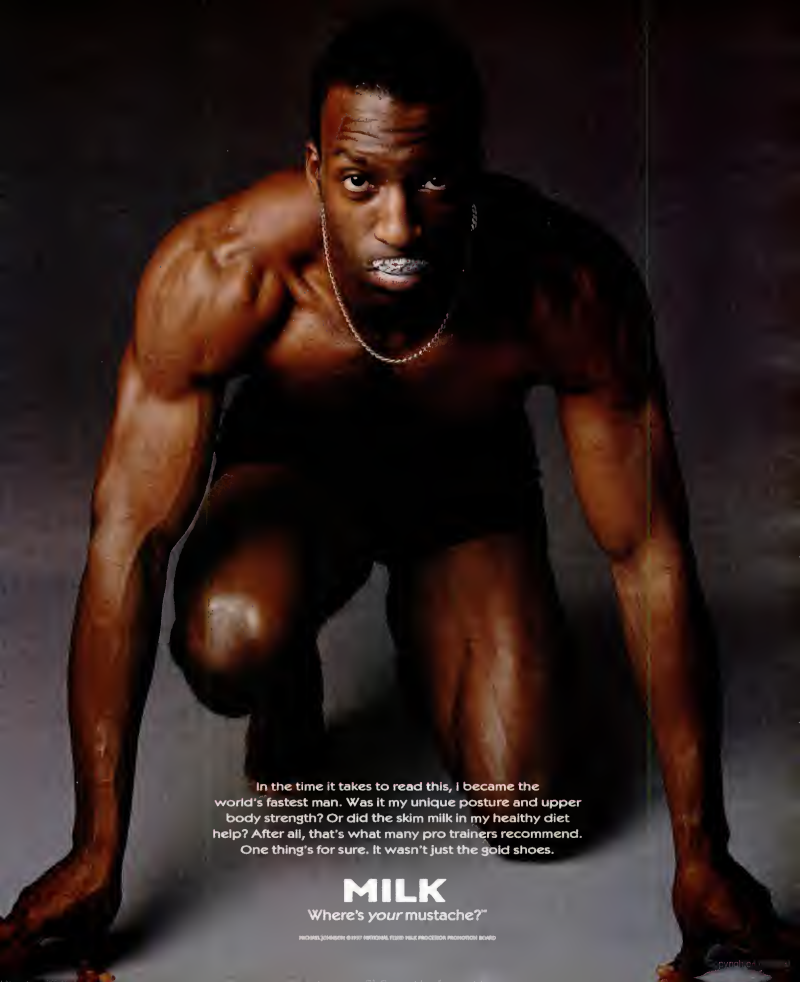

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In the MIX Too Bangin'

1. Warren G and Ronald Isley play out some sort of fantasy on the set of Warren's new video, "Smokin' Me Out." 2. Halle Berry stopped by N.Y.C.'s Planet Hollywood to promote that crazy movie *B.A.P.S.* (Did anybody see it anyway?) Halle may be a princess, but maybe the paper gold crown isn't such a good look for her—people may get the impression that she's losing it. 3. Jada Pinkett blessed this year's Essence Awards with her presence. This was probably her reaction after the millionth person asked her where Will was. 4. Toni Braxton hit the runway for her favorite fashion designer, Marc Bouwer (left), during fashion week in New York. Hey, if she's got it, why shouldn't she work it? 5. Ginuwine and Aaliyah were just two of the celebrity models at N.Y.C.'s Hot 97 Fashion Show. Judging by Aaliyah's expression, it looks like she can't find any reason either why Ginuwine should constantly keep his shirt open. (6.) Seasoned model Treach, who need never wear a shirt, also modeled in the show. Maybe he should get off the runway long enough to record another Naughty album. Some of us miss the Treach that was strictly Timba boots and jail suits. (7.) Sticky Fingaz of Onyx gets dressed backstage. He'll probably be the next rapper to turn model because he's getting to the point where he's too sexy for Onyx. It's hard to be pretty and grimy at the same time. 8. Kadeem Hardison is outta control. Here, he frisks his proud mama, Bethann, during a shakedown at a party for *The 6th Man* at the Official All Star Cafe in N.Y.C. 9. You know, 36-year-old Keith Sweat should probably stop sitting on young girls' laps. Looks like he crushed some poor woman while singing at his club, Industry, in Atlanta. 10. Tracey Lee performing "The Theme" to an enthusiastic Long Island crowd. 11. Ecstasy of Whodini is shown rhyming at K104 FM Super Jam in Dallas. It's shirts like the one he's got on that make you wonder if people are wearing Versace because they actually think they look cute or because it's really trendy. Somehow the former just doesn't seem possible. 12. No sibling rivalry here. Brandy and her cute little brother, Ray J, are still best friends at a small show he gave at Life in Manhattan, S.S.





In the time it takes to read this, I became the world's fastest man. Was it my unique posture and upper body strength? Or did the skim milk in my healthy diet help? After all, that's what many pro trainers recommend. One thing's for sure. It wasn't just the gold shoes.

MILK

Where's your mustache?

PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN BERRY. STYLING BY JONATHAN BERRY. HAIR BY JONATHAN BERRY. MAKEUP BY JONATHAN BERRY. PRODUCTION BY JONATHAN BERRY.

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Answers

start

In the last issue, I asked God for an answer. I only expected one, but I received hundreds. From top to Lo, friends, and those I don't know. From Brooklyn to Berkeley—sometimes Hungary but no Turkey—every day is Thanksgiving when God blesses a child with his or her own. This particular piece is to publicly thank all of you who showed support by writing some of the most emotionally stirring letters I've ever had the pleasure of penetrating. It's a wonderful feeling coming back from tour and seeing a stack of mail screaming to be read! Most of these letters deal with the Job Korps ideal—building something amid turbulent conditions. Neither rain nor snow nor sleet gets too deep to show love to my peeps on Toph Street.

I've prayed and meditated on how to respond to the many voices that demand "carplay." I know that I'm very late in replying to some of these letters, but I have not forgotten you. If your letter doesn't appear here today, there is always tomorrow. In the meantime, I hope these answers help with your questions. Now, to show you, whoever you are, wherever you are, that what you say matters to me and a whole lot of other people, here are your five minutes on the loudspeaker. Enjoy!

I've had nothing but drama from people who I thought were on the same team as me but who just were not trying to put in the same type of work as I was to achieve all our goals.
—Michael Bailey, Chicago, IL

Frustrated and confused about making it to the top? Join the club. Success shouldn't be measured by the title or position you acquire; but, rather, by the obstacles you overcome. Always have faith in things unseen—they'll help you deal with the visible challenges before you. And choose your friends by what they stand for, not what they lean against. Whoever's not balling with you is on the opposing team.

I've written to plenty of journalists and reporters thinking someone should render a brother some advice about how to pursue a career in writing. But it seems like I wasted paper, because none have flown me a kite even saying "Brish off Ock, handle your own biz." Needless to say, I am debilitated.
—Jayson Leigh, Hunlock Creek, PA

Journalists need only three things: a voice, a venue, and an audience. Writers need only one: a pen. The best writers keep a home journal and write every day. You could also pick a character you find

interesting and profile them. Yes, to the internship idea with a magazine or newspaper. Yes, the National Association of Black Journalists has been helping writers like yourself for years. Contact them and bring your pen to the battle.

I am interested in starting my own business selling cheesecakes and other bakery/catering delicacies. My main problem is, I don't know anything about starting my own business.
—Cynthia Davidson, Waterbury, CT

I've passed your number to a friend of mine at BMI. Suggestion: They all say they'll call you, but that's not always true! Do yourself a favor and tell them who you are and what you need. If she sends for you, and you should meet, sing in her grill like it was Carnegie Hall.

We believe that by empowering youth we can reduce the rate at which they get involved with crime. We will hold our first advisory/get acquainted meeting/dinner soon. The din-

novelist get a little help from Job Korps?
—Derrick D. Owens, PO#0338 Eastern Correctional Facility, NY

Your letter is one of my favorites. If my words have inspired you to write after serving so many years, then we've both been blessed to the fullest! Anyone who has the balls to bleed for their dream(s) fits my demographic and qualifies for membership to the "Super Friends." I'd be very proud to sponsor you on your book. Send me a two-page summary of your vision, and I'll help you push it—promise! Your dream might be closer than you think. Don't give up five minutes before the finish line! I'm sending the A Team. Amen!

I'm serving a sentence of four-and-a-half to nine years for the sale of one bag of heroin. What I've witnessed since I've been here is totally unbelievable. If you think that jail is a piece of cake, you're dead wrong. After this letter, who knows what will happen to me?
—Luis Martin/"El Bubu" Attica Pen

You're enrolled in the second-highest university on the planet, so your re-education will be superior to those who never had to survive behind the wall. You're absolutely right, nixing your life to save others is what it's all about! On the other hand, surviving to speak against negative lifestyles validates your very existence. Only then do you transform yourself into an example for those who love you.

If any of you confront the same obstacles as these soldiers, then you're the strongest type of leader—the kind that doesn't need a title or a weapon, just a point of view and the courage to carry it out. The road will not be easy; in fact, it'll be harder than Chinese math. Make a list of the 10 most important things to you. No one can satisfy all 10—that's impossible. If you get to five or six, though, you're on your way to your own perfect world. Most of all, strength needs no excuse.



Start reading *Forbes* and *Inc.* magazines. They offer rich information on starting your own business. Also, contact the Small Business Administration (SBA) at 800-827-5722. They can help anybody form any business. The best part? They specialize in aiding the underdog; but you're gonna need cream to make it fluffy. Please mail me some cheesecake on your grand opening.

I listen to the radio and say, My songs are just as good if not better than that. And I'm not talking little four-line songs. All I want is a chance to prove myself. Most of my songs are copyrighted. Now it's time to take the next step, but I don't know what that is. That's where you come in.
—Daven Astrop, Ypsilanti, MI

ner served will be grilled breast of chicken. The cost will be \$9.95. If you would like a different dinner, see the enclosed menu, and indicate your choice on the reply card.
—Wanda Best-DeVaux, Citizens Against Recidivism, NY

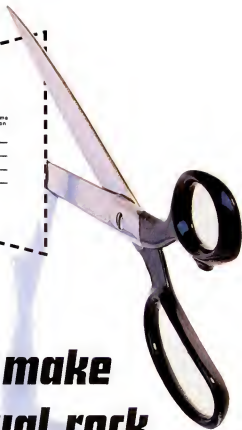
What's happenin'! Put me down for a lamb rack, mashed potatoes, thick yogurt-style gravy, six to eight buttermilk biscuits, a whole bowl of pork-seasoned collared greens with butter and vinegar, and a hot glass of V8 to wash it down. After that, count me in on anything that will help our people locked down.

Bönz, if it's gonna take me ten to fifteen years to be an overnight success, I've got to get back to work on my book asap. Can an aspiring

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Street**
.....
By
**Bönz
Malone**

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All persons will be screened. Colored persons, based upon the results of a physical examination, may be required to complete a medical history and physical examination and possibly receive a skin biopsy. In the event of a cardiovascular examination, a person with a known heart condition or who has experienced chest pain or shortness of breath in the past 6 months will need to obtain clearance from a physician. Any person with a heart condition or who has experienced chest pain or shortness of breath in the past 6 months will need to obtain clearance from a physician. The screening process will be completed by the end of the day. The screening process will be completed by the end of the day. The screening process will be completed by the end of the day.

* Grand Prize (\$100K). Sorry the Odds: Collected retail value \$120 each; First Prize (\$25K); Sorry Classroom: Estimated retail value \$750 each; Second Prize (\$20K); Sorry Walkabout: Estimated retail value \$70 each. Total estimated retail value of all prizes \$95,000.
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Jazz Explorer

For those who follow jazz, the question of whether the music's exploration period is over is deadly serious. After Ellington, Monk, Miles, Ornette, Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra, and Coltrane [see feature on page 106], what epic journeys are left? Only a few intrepid souls have even attempted to answer the question. Count the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Henry Threadgill, and this month's star, Lawrence "Butch" Morris, among the expedition leaders.

Morris, 50, an L.A. native, was among the wave of midwestern and Californian musicians who migrated to New York in the 1970s and reignited the avant-garde. His contemporaries include folks such as David Murray, Oliver Lake, Arthur Blythe, and the late Julius Hemphill of the World Saxophone Quartet. His brother is the esteemed bassist Wilber Morris. He first came to our attention as a cornetist on some of Murray's earliest albums, and later as the conductor of the David Murray Big Band. It's as a conductor of improvisational ensembles that Morris is taking a stab at jazz immortality.

In the late '70s, he began developing a method he would term "conduction," a vocabulary of hand signs and baton gestures that would enable him to alter arrangements on the bandstand with the fluidity of a soloist. Some of the best early examples of conduction can be heard on David Murray's *Live at Sweet Basil, Volumes 1 and 2* (1984), and on Morris's own *Current Trends in American Racism* (1985). More up-to-date variations are to be found on Morris's 10-CD boxed set *Testament: A Conduction Collection* (New World Records, 1995), which includes 16 conductions recorded over a 10-year period in Turkey, Japan, Italy, Germany, New York, and Florida.

What makes the conduction process fascinating is knowing that nothing is written down and watching the graceful, balletic Morris literally pulling music out of the air. The instruments Morris favors tend toward the exotic for jazz. The last ensemble I saw him with comprised four acoustic basses, two cellos, three violins, piano, drums, oboe, trumpet, and trombone. On the conductions from Turkey and Japan, some players use traditional folk instruments like the *kemençe* and the *koto*.

Morris's family turns out to have been very musical. Besides brother Wilber, his sister Marceline was an award-winning concert pianist in her youth,

while his older brother, Joseph, was a citywide clarinet champion who went on to become a champion boxer in the military. Butch took up trumpet at the age of 14; he credits Miles and Gil Evans's collaborations with sparking his own music awakening.

After graduating from high school in 1966, Morris enlisted in the Army; on the same day, he was drafted. His first post after basic was Stuttgart, Germany,

sending me. They made me a medic when I got to Vietnam because they were short on medics. They'd bring a guy in and say, 'Morris, sew him up and ship him out.' That was my training.

"The thing that trips me out was that the only day I almost lost my life was the day the colonel said he wanted some flowers on his desk. I went out to this field to pick flowers, and we got shot at. When I got back, it hit me that I could

sition [he is an extraordinary melodist, a kaleidoscopic arranger] and, later, in developing conduction. 'When I began seriously composing, I found I couldn't get notation to do what I wanted it to do. When I hear a lot of notated chamber music, it sounds like it's music that's still on the page—like music you see instead of music you hear. I was trying to figure out how to get notated music to rise up off the page.'

Though Morris is as trained as they come, his approach to musicking has more in common with hip hop producers like the RZA than with his jazz contemporaries. Not only in its results, but in Morris's attitude toward his player-haters: "I've forged ahead fueled by resistance. A lot of times, the more resistance I met, the more courage I got, in a strange sort of way. A lot of people say, 'Well, you can't do that—what gives you the right? Improvisation is supposed to be free.' Of course I can do it; you see me doing it. That's a very European notion, that improvisation means just play what you want. There is a system, a vocabulary. All I want to do is teach you the system so I can create a structure around what you have to contribute."

Are we talking chaos or democracy here? You need to hear and see Morris do his thing before you decide. While you're making up your mind, Morris will keep on waving his magic baton and conjuring up the most multiculturally inclusive sounds this side of a United Nations summit conference.

"What I'm interested in now is the symphonic orchestra," he says, "because it's stagnant, even the twentieth-century stuff. And it doesn't matter whether it's Penderecki, Xenakis, or Boulez. It's not my taste, and it doesn't get in my body. Whether my music is considered jazz or not, I still consider myself a jazz musician, and whether you think my music swings or not, it still contains the things that make swing happen, which are combustion, ignition, and propulsion. What I'm talking about is how you get up under there, how you heat an orchestra up, how you ignite that shit and set it on fire. That's what I'm talking about."

Black-Owned
By
Greg Tate



BUTCH MORRIS
"The more resistance I met, the more courage I got."

where he got to rile southern rednecks with his Nina Simone and John Coltrane records. "I wasn't listening to that music politically until those guys brought it to my attention," he says. "After that, I'd play it whenever they came in the barracks drunk. A lot of fights broke out from my playing Nina Simone."

Morris might have missed Vietnam had he not put in for a transfer. "I started taking pills for my nerves because a lot of crazy stuff started happening in the barracks, like homosexual rapes, drugs, killings, and a lot of racist stuff. The doctor told me he couldn't give me any more pills because I'd become dependent. I put in for a transfer and told them, Don't tell me where you're

have been dead because this colonel wanted some motherfucking flowers."

Morris returned home intending to study prosthetics and, instead, discovered Arthur Blythe and Bobby Bradford, two pillars of the West Coast free jazz scene, rehearsing in his mother's garage with brother Wilber. "What they were playing was really the black revolution," he says. "It was a very melodic free music. It was ruthless, but there was some romanticism attached to it. I heard it as all this black that they had sprinkled a little blue on. What they played would go so deep in your soul, man. It also made me think, Now that's some bad shit, but where is my shit at?"

Morris found his answer in compo-

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY AROCH

start



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start

During the 1960s, I was living in Amsterdam Projects, in Hell's Kitchen [Manhattan]. A lot of friends there were in gangs; but in those days, we called them social clubs. You didn't carry a gun; you fought with your hands. Today it's all 'I'll put a cap in your ass.' The group of guys I rolled with just liked to hang out. I would jet down to Port Authority, get newspapers, and walk up Ninth Avenue, selling them from bar to bar. It felt good to come home and say, *Mi casa, mami!* I made forty bucks today. Here's thirty, I'm keeping ten. Bread, baby, bread! I'm not afraid of hustling.

I never considered acting at all; I wanted to be a cop. In the early '70s, most of the bad guys on TV were black and Hispanic, while most of the lead roles were white. But I just did my own

At one point, I was on the cover of, like, fourteen different magazines at the same time. As far as women go, I was young; I was on a hit series. It was like being in Toys "R" Us. Yeah, I was a play-

One time I had an accident on the set of *CHiPs*, and I broke my hand and my jaw. I was pissed. So they said, 'What can we do just to get you to come back to work? What if we put a Rolls Royce in your driveway?' And they did. Then

Well, the ratings went in the toilet. They cast Bruce Jenner in the show to replace me. And I laughed, because the chemistry was just not going to work. I finally signed to get a million and a half at the end of the fifth year, two million when we start the sixth year, and the rest when we start the seventh. I won the battle, but I was gonna lose the war. They canceled the show 'cause they didn't want to pay me my millions, *tu sabes*. And I couldn't get another fucking job in this town. Nobody ever said why they wouldn't give me a particular role; there was no 'blacklist.' That's not how it works in Hollywood.

Doing *Chips* was great in that it provided me with the financial situation I'd always wanted. I bought my mother a house, bought my sister a car. I took care of everybody. But every time I go to see a movie, I say, Motherfucker, I could've done that. I'll have to deal with that the rest of my life. Because I know I was headed that way until I went up against the forces at *Chips*.

But I did survive. You know why? 'Cause I've always protected that 'little fucker' in me. The little person that you gotta protect in you, no matter what. He keeps saying to me, Don't worry, man. You're gonna get there. You're gonna get everything you want. It's coming."

PULL OVER
Ponch flexin' Glock and cock

Now, as far as *CHiPs* goes...Larry Wilcox [who played Ponch's partner Jon] and I are friends now; but at the time, he was hired to be, like, the Lone Ranger on the show. I was supposed to be Tonto. When the show started airing and the letters started coming for me, the studio just went, 'Whoa! We got something here. People like the way this guy looks, they like the show, they like

So there I was at the start of the fifth year, with twenty-five percent of net profits. I read: MGM SELLS A TEN-YEAR SYNDICATION RUN OF *CHIPS* FOR \$75 MILLION! I said, *¡Conio!* Twenty-five percent of the net profits is mine! So I walked into the head office with my two attorneys. And here's this guy, the head of MGM, David Begelman, the baddest-ass to go up against, and he says, 'Hey,

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Africa's Hip Hop Generation

South African youth and American youth live in parallel universes. *By Farai Chideya*

It was a reunion (or, since we'd never met before, a union) to remember. This February, in the courtyard of a rural boarding school in Zimbabwe, I got to meet, hug, and high five my half-brother Munyaradzi for the first time. I'd exchanged letters with the brainy 15-year-old, but since I hadn't returned to Zimbabwe, my father's birthplace, in 22 years, we'd never met face-to-face. His shock and excitement on meeting me were palpable: He had no idea I was coming. Then we piled into my aunt's truck for a three-hour ride back to the main town of Harare.

You might ask yourself what we talked about during those first few precious hours of our relationship. Well, Munyaradzi popped Busta Rhymes into the tape deck, and we started talking hip hop. Tupac. Biggie. Wu-Tang. Who had I met? Who's pumping out the dopest rhymes? And Tupac isn't really dead, is he?

Munyaradzi's fascination with U.S. culture in general, and hip hop in particular, was replicated time and time again as I met other young Africans. While we in the United States often take our situation to be unique—as if nobody else understands our struggles—many African youths are looking to America to find ways to express their own hopes, fears, and frustrations. American pop culture has always been global pop culture, so it's only natural that black Africans would identify with black American artists. That's true most of all in Zimbabwe's neighbor South Africa.

South African youth and American youth live in parallel universes. Both countries are enveloped by elements of Western culture—freeways, malls, dance clubs, McDonald's. Both are consumed by debates over what racial equality means and how to provide economic opportunity. America, which is 80 percent white, has had the basic legal foundations for racial equality since the Civil War ended, 132

years ago, but so far we haven't made equality a reality. South Africa, which is 80 percent black, held its first multiracial elections less than five years ago; but because the sheer numbers of nonwhites (not just blacks but South Asians and mixed-race "coloreds") are so high, it may have a better chance at rapid change.

We each have a different lingo for the realities of urban life. Folks from the 'hood in the U.S. are "township youth" in South Africa. (And the harsh realities of America's ghettos mirror South Africa's townships, where blacks were corralled after Afrikaners confiscated their land.) Township kids listen not only to American hip hop but to their own urban sounds called *kwaito*.

Just as American artists face struggles over government censorship, personal responsibility, and violence among urban musicians, so too do South Africa's crews. A rap group called Prophets of da City (POC) got their video "Understand Where I'm Coming From" played on the national television

network of Sotho and Zulu or whatever ones here?" Well, some South Africans are now starting to rap in Zulu, which puts the final boomering on the Africa-to-America influences that shaped hip hop in the first place: Africans reinventing black American culture that was shaped by African ancestry.

South Africans are also debating the same issues of lyric sexism that we are here in the U.S. of A. Kwaito artists deliver their raps in a township slang called *Tiotiotala* (a crucial means of reaching speakers of all South Africa's 11 official languages), and its lyrics are every bit as controversial as ours. One song goes: "Di beerie di cheapie / Le bana ba letle / Bai kull-wa byefe / Ba balla lerete," or "The beer is cheap / The girls are feeling bitchy / And want to be fucked." Given that South Africa has one of the highest rape rates in the world, many women are not amused.

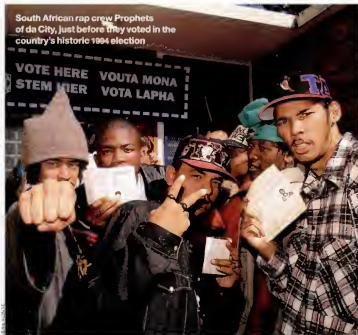
But the biggest controversy is that South Africa's hip hop and kwaito artists seem to be taking a page from our own rivalries and are starting to threaten one another. Earlier this year, one kwaito artist,

Arthur Mafokate, canceled some scheduled performances and nearly quit the business, saying his life was in danger. Mafokate, the owner of 999 Records, was accused of biting by people at another label, Kalawa. Both crews were said to be armed, and local media chalked it up to an imitation of America's East Coast–West Coast feud.

Although many South African teens are hungry for any hip hop album they can buy, many worry also that our attitudes are influencing their own decisions about violence. Students at a school where a classmate was fatally shot pointed the finger—rightly or wrongly—at the influence of American culture. Sixteen-year-old Natalie Whener said that local teens "see how children get attention overseas because they carry guns...and maybe they think they will get the same attention if they have the same attitude."

Africa's hip hop generation has a lesson for America's: We young Americans are not alone, isolated, or culturally alien. As the people who make heads nod around the world, we have a tremendous power to turn our experiences into global culture, to draft nothing less than a blueprint for what young people's lives can be. Now the challenge is to use that power wisely.

POWER



network only after it had won an award in France. The station managers at South Africa Broadcasting Company banned the video for four years, arguing that it embodied a "spirit of violence."

South Africa's hip hop scene is still relatively small, in part because so many kids listen to American music. POC's manager was quoted in the (Johannesburg) *Mail and Guardian* as saying: "Everywhere you look, America is the dream for most South African youths. ...Now that's fucked up, because if we're going to succeed in building a hip hop identity here, the sounds have got to be South African and pertain to what's happening here." The newspaper article went on to say, "Why do we have to hear about Nubian princesses when there are plen-

Afro-Activist

For TransAfrica's Randall Robinson, the struggle never ends. By Jennifer Connerman

Randall Robinson lives on the front lines of the battle to make American foreign policy responsive to the needs of Africa and her people. In the 1980s, he was instrumental in the fight to abolish apartheid. While the Reverend Leon Sullivan authored the sanctions against South Africa, it was Robinson who galvanized public support by organizing mass demonstrations at the South African embassy, as well as by lobbying Congress to cut economic ties with South Africa. More recently, he successfully pushed for President Clinton to change his policy on admitting Haitian refugees to the U.S.

Robinson, 55, runs TransAfrica, a Washington, D.C.-based lobbying group that keeps the pressure on politicians to make decisions and pass legislation friendly to Africa and the Caribbean. When Robinson founded the organization in 1977, virtually no African-Americans held top foreign policy positions. Twenty years later, Robinson himself is regarded as a leading policy expert. And with the recent turmoil in countries like Rwanda and Zaire, Robinson's insight is now all the more critical. VIBE spoke to Robinson about what he learned from South Africa, about getting young Americans to care about foreign affairs, and about his newest crusade—restoring democracy in troubled black-run nations such as Nigeria.

What does the term "African-American" mean to you? And do you think there is a real sense of connection between African-Americans and Africa?

I really don't believe one can love oneself as an African-American, as a black person, unless one loves the continent that produced you. I find these things indivisible—I love myself, and therefore I love Africa. And an affront to Africa is an affront that I take very personally, particularly when it issues from my own government. While we are very much American, and we have contributed a great deal to the development of this country, we are still African-Americans, which means we have an interest in Africa.

Sometimes tensions arise between young African blacks and Africans living in America over cultural and political

POWER

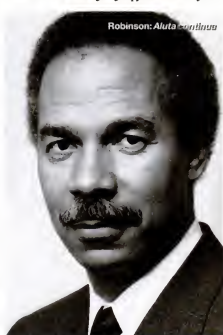
differences. Do you find there is a lot of friction between these two groups? And is that an obstacle to your work?

I'm not surprised about tensions. Americans don't know very much about anything west of L.A. or east of Washington, D.C. And it's not just true of African-Americans—very few Americans can name a province in Canada or a state of Mexico.

What first sparked your interest in South Africa?

I went to South Africa in December 1976, when only a handful of Americans knew who Nelson Mandela was. You could see the indications of segregation everywhere. And looking down on it all were billboards for American companies that were doing quite well in South Africa because of this kind of tyranny. They were profiting while blacks were being paid virtual slave wages.

TransAfrica's new target is the military dictatorship in Nigeria. Are U.S. corporations aiding Nigeria's government in the same way they supported South Africa's



Robinson: Aluta Gonturu

apartheid?

Nigeria's tyranny could not persist without partnership with the American private sector—without Mobil, Texaco, and other American oil companies.

How exactly do American dollars fuel Nigeria's dictatorship?

The United States is the largest purchaser in the world of Nigerian petroleum products. Some ten billion dollars a year flows through the hands of Sani Abacha, the general who controls the Nigerian military. But very little of this reaches the Nigerian people. Millions of stolen public monies have been siphoned to his accounts—making a country that ought to be rich, poor.

To end apartheid, TransAfrica successfully lobbied Congress to stop U.S. corporations from doing business in South Africa. Are you using this same strategy in Nigeria?

I'm hoping for sanctions from the U.S. government that would cause the oil companies to sever their relationships with the Nigerian government. Only when this is done will we see the general step down and the birth of freedom and democracy in Nigeria.

How did you manage to turn African-American anger at apartheid into a mass movement that encompassed Americans of all races?

What we were able to do in that case—which is not easy—was to turn a foreign policy issue into a domestic issue. Apartheid was seen by many as an extension of America's attitudes and policies toward its own racial minorities, particularly African-Americans, who have suffered some of the same slights and discrimination that black South Africans were suffering.

The oppression in Nigeria is black-on-black. Will that make it more difficult to get people involved in this struggle?

You don't have the kind of race chemistry that drove the South African campaign in the United States. It is not easy for African-Americans to publicly criticize a black government. But one has to understand that criticizing a corrupt general is not a criticism of Nigeria, which comprises one hundred million people who are put upon by the very government that we're trying to get out of power.

A lot of people credit you with helping to change President Clinton's policy toward Haitian refugees. What was the problem with his original policy, and what did you do to fix it?

When he was campaigning against George Bush, the President said that the automatic return to Haiti of refugees fleeing with a well-founded fear of persecution was cruel and inhumane. Upon being sworn in as President, he reversed his policy immediately—and began to round up these men, women, and children fleeing for their lives, returning them to their killers. I engaged in a hunger strike almost as a last resort to focus public attention on an indefensible Clinton Administration policy.

You ate nothing and drank only juice for twenty-seven days. How did that affect your body? And how did politicians and the public respond?

Had there been no wave of publicity provoked by the hunger strike, I might have died. I was extremely weak and had lost twenty pounds. My pulse ran dangerously high, so I had to be hospitalized. Because of the attention paid to the hunger strike, and therefore to the issue of repatriation, the President found himself with an inhumane policy that he could not defend. So the policy was changed.

How can young Americans help in your ongoing fight to oust Nigeria's dictator?

The readers of VIBE magazine can make an enormous difference by writing letters to Congress and the President insisting that this is an issue about which they are concerned. What we need are sanctions from Congress—and pressure on these oil companies—to cause the Nigerian general to step down and allow democracy to flourish. Absent that pressure, Nigeria will implode and drag much of Africa down in its undertow. The stakes are very high. ■



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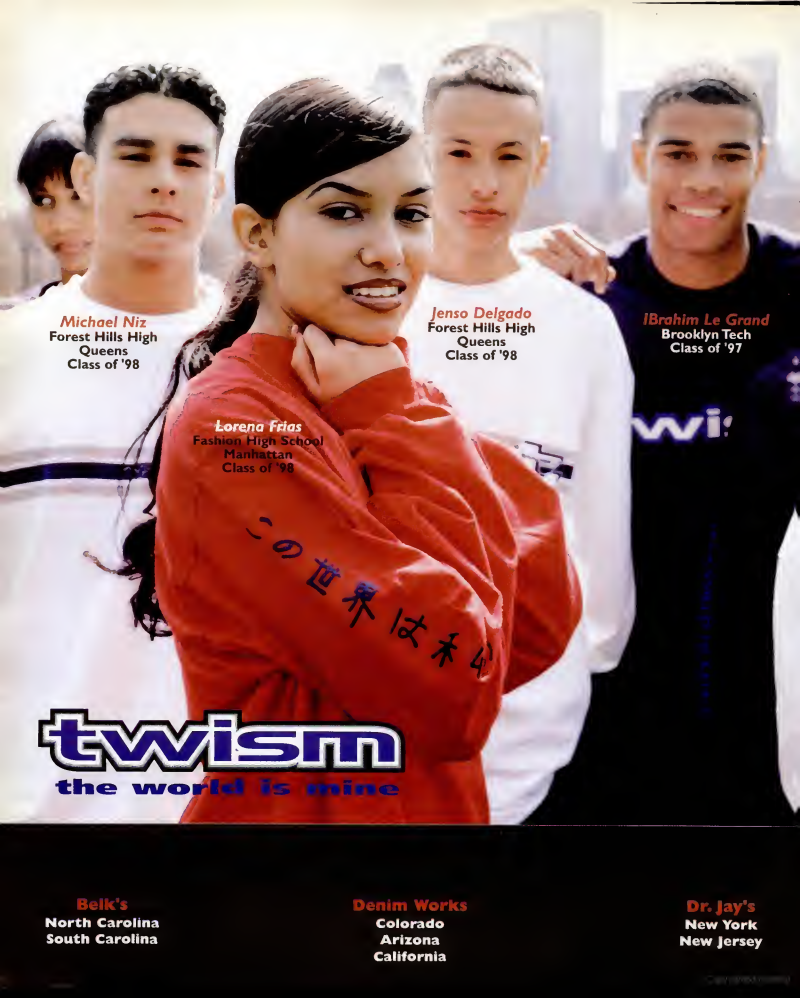
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MARK MORRISON

London calling...

RELAXING IN HIS LONDON HOME, WEARING ADIDAS tennis shoes and a pair of track pants, England's latest soul rebel, Mark Morrison, is recovering after a wild night of partying. "My people always tell me that I shouldn't go out that much now that I'm famous," he says, snickering. "But I don't feel like a star. I just like goin' to little hole-in-the-wall clubs where the real people hang out."

But with the American release of his single "Return of the Mack" (which is also his album's title), Morrison crossed the line that separates real folks from artists on a mission. In his homeland, the regal Morrison, 25, has been at the center of music mania since he dropped his first single, "Crazy," in 1994. "I had been living in Florida for eight years when I returned home for a holiday," Morrison says. "I started doing music with some fellas and just decided to stay."

While influenced by Stateside sensations ranging from Kool & the Gang to Miami bass, Morrison clearly has a special fondness for Cameo commander Larry Blackmon, to whom he bears—vocally, at least—a striking resemblance. "I've always loved 'Candy' and 'Word Up,'" Morrison says, laughing. "But I'm not wearing a red codpiece. Believe me, I have enough problems."

Not an exaggeration. Even if Morrison's ballad "Moan and Groan" was written for bedroom G's, the singer has been a staple of the British press for his run-ins with the London police, which have resulted in several misdemeanors. "They've reported that I beat promoters, threw people out of rooms, all in an attempt to bring me down. I was just convicted yesterday," he says bitterly of a minor incident that escalated into a charge of threatening a police officer with a stun gun. (At press time, Morrison had just received a three-month jail sentence.)

But with his feet planted firmly on the hardwood floors and sun flooding through the skylight, Morrison is contemplative. "Return of the Mack was to define me coming from a negative situation to a positive. But as a black man in this country, I'm going to have my problems. I can't focus on that; I have to concentrate on my music. To paraphrase Puffy: No one can stop me now."

Michael A. Gonzales

NEXT

PEOPLE ON THE VERGE

"YORUBA HAS HELPED ME calm down, helped me change myself," says rapstress Gloria "Hurricane G" Rodríguez in the middle of her initiation into priest(ess)hood. Her living room is replete with houses to her orisha, Oshun, Goddess of Love, and Yemaya, Mother of Creation; comrade Redman's single "Tonight's da Nite" adorns a glass end table. "I took Redman to get a *limpieza* (spiritual cleansing)," she says, laughing. "On the low, he loved that shit."

At 26, Hurricane has shed the raw demeanor she possessed when rolling with the Hit Squad back in 1991 and,

since '93, the Def Squad. Best remembered for demanding that Redman "get wit that rough shit" on "Tonight's da Nite" and testifying that she "takes [her] funk and religion serious" on "We Run N.Y." (both from Redman's 1994 *Dare Iz a Darkside*), Hurricane will dawn solo with *All Woman*, a set of Spanglish raps interspersed with Yoruba chants. Tracks like "El Barrio," "Roc U," and "No ♥"—a song about her child's father, rapper Erick

Sermon—take us through her ghetto politics.

"You think the *street* got drama, try fucking with a niga in the *industry*," Hurricane says of her former boyfriend. Sermon was the first to initiate her album project in 1989 by producing "Milky," a track featuring Redman that leaked into underground circles via a Mercedes stolen from Sermon. Stubbom

Taurean Hurricane has nonetheless managed to navigate the waters of their turbulent six-year relationship (they share a four-year-old daughter, Lexus) and put a bad experience with her former label behind her. In 1994 Hurricane attempted a solo album for Capitol Records, only to be dropped amid the messy dissolution of the label's Black Music department.

Taking it in stride, a cool-headed Hurricane is now reigning on H.O.L.A. Records, dealing with the pressures of underground fan expectations and single parenthood. For now, she's awaiting the day she can leave the city and become a farmer. "I might even go to Nigeria," she says. "Back to the foundation."

Raquel Cepeda

NEXT

HURRICANE G
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The Mighty Ha

NEXT

CRU
Videodrone

Chadio

Yogi

70 VIDE

A JEEP-DRIVEN TOUR OF SOUTH Bronx's historical hip hop sites isn't complete without a stop at Bronx River Houses. Even on the hectic day before his group's first video shoot, Cru's Chadio is more than happy to oblige as tour guide.

"Right there, you see the center?" the bespectacled MC asks. "It used to be on in there, B: Afrika Islam, Grandmixer D. ST. When you walked in the projects and heard niggas through the windows rockin', it was an aura you can't explain. If you talkin' about hip hop, B, these projects is like Mecca."

Longtime residents of the South Boogie's nearby Lafayette "Island" Projects (a.k.a. L.I.P.), Chadio and his Cru cohorts—MC/production wizard Yogi and (temporarily incarcerated) vocal sparring partner the Mighty Ha—are twentysomething "newcomers" with a lifelong education in hip hop that emphasized old school mic-rocking techniques. The group's blazing debut single, "Just Another Case" (featuring fellow BX rap magnate Slick Rick), and its illfated, holler-like-ya-know-me, B-side party jam, "Pronto," reveal that they paid close attention to their lessons.

"Hip hop now is just, 'Gimme sixteen or twenty-four bars [to rhyme].'" says the breaklike Yogi. "We're trying to break all the rules—we hate choruses."

"We hate formats," adds Chadio. Creativity speaks volumes on Cru's LP *Da Dirty 30*, which sounds like Mudbone meets Rudy Ray Moore meets Cold Crush on amphetamines. Surprisingly, though, Cru display absolutely no love for a medium that plays to their convention-bashing strengths: videos.

"Fuck videos!" derides Chadio. "Back when we heard a Rakim record, like 'Eric B. Is President,' you used your own imagination."

"Understand," reasons Yogi, "in a small way, we kinda conquered the industry. Nobody knows who the fuck we are, and we got regular spins on Hot 97. We had no video, we didn't even really have no push. If this was fuckin' '86 or '87, we'd be the fuckin' kings right now."

"That's the whole shit," Chadio says, finishing his partner's thought. "Niggas is just lovin' your shit—no video, no nothin'. Just raw hip hop, yo."

Chairman Mao

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IT'S LATE SPRING IN HARLEM, AND you can't walk a block without seeing at least 10 advertisements for R&B quartet Allure. On their promotional posters, Alia, Linnie, Akissa, and Lalisha look like all those other female groups: heavy on makeup, short on clothes. And at first glance, the track listing of Allure's eponymous debut—loaded predictably with love songs, sampled beats, and guest rappers (Nas, LL Cool J, Raekwon)—appears also to follow the generic '90s recipe for R&B success.

So, what's all the hubbub if

Allure are so typical? Just ask a guy named Poke. After hearing the ladies audition at a Bronx community center in 1995, the Track Master was so enamored with their range that he introduced them to the dog-whistle messiah, Mariah Carey. Carey was so taken by Allure's pure tone and youthful spunk (they range in age from 19 to 21) that she made them the first act on her new label, Crave.

But despite the radio success of the New York natives' debut single, "Head Over Heels," Allure are aware that

some folks still believe their shtick is paper-thin. "People doubt us," says Akissa. "They think we're just four nice-looking girls who were thrown together, but we've been singing as a group for four years."

Even though beatmakers-of-the-moment Track Masters produced Allure and the group's boss, Mrs. Mottola, has gone platinum a billion times, the ladies insist there's no pressure to move product. They're more concerned with honing their skills. "I have to learn to dance,"

Linnie says, laughing. "Alia and I are so twisted, they shot us from the hip up in our video." But even if they have no steps, the quartet certainly can sing. Their upcoming single, "No Question," should help silence the skeptics.

Allure are also trying to adjust to the rigors of touring. Their hardest gig? "New Orleans," the quartet say in unison. Apparently, some Big Easy club kids were a smidgen too "bout it," 'bout it. "Guys were grabbing us and yelling for us to take off our clothes," Lalisha recalls. "They wanted us to strip onstage," Alia adds. "I guess our posters don't do us justice." *OJ Lima*

From left: Linnie, Lalisha, Akissa, Alia



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SOUL SISTER NUMBER ONE

Earthy and ethereal, regal and real, Erykah Badu captures what was, what is, and what the world needs now: love, peace, and *Baduizm*. By Greg Tate.

Photographs by Barron Claiborne

Erykah Badu? Who knew? Not I, said the fly. And the fly that is I gets paid to be up on who got next. Just when we thought couldn't nobody be a black woman in pop music without being a provocative pop tart, a put-it-on-the-glass video ho, or a gold-digging hoochie mama, here comes Badu—on BET, no less, home of the superficial, land of the fake. Celebrating scrial motherhood, Mississippi mud baths, *The Color Purple*, shotgun shacks, and sky-high African-village-woman *geles*, this earth goddess goes on and on in a voice part Ella, part sassy Sarah, part Billie, part Nina, yet all Badu.

We felt her and her cipher, rolling until the break of dawn, and tripping over that line about how "intellects don't believe in God but fear us just the same." Say what? Is this Badu some angel-eyed lay preacher for the Islamic splinter sect, the Five Percent Nation? She got the nerve to put in song form what everybody knows don't sell, like politics, sensuality, positivity, spirituality, and intelligence. Say what?

Without showing tits or ass, doing free ads for Versace, or pointing a Glock from East to West, here comes Badu, mightily armed with her staggering debut, *Baduizm*, hitting No. 1 on *Billboard's* R&B charts. In the whirlwind months since she opened for D'Angelo in her native Dallas and flipped the wig of D's then manager, Kedar Massenburg, things have happened fast for the former Erykah Wright. She quickly turned up in the video for D'Angelo's "Lady" and duetted with him on a remake of Marvin and Tammi's "Your Precious Love," the highlight of the *High School High* soundtrack. After the commercial breakthroughs of neo-soul brothers D'Angelo, Tony Rich, and Maxwell, "twas

time for a sister to get down for the crown: Enter Badu and her soaring debut cut, "On & On."

Baduizm passed the million-sold mark in just three months, and that was when the record's second smash, "Next Lifetime," was still heating up. And now, with the release of the sure-to-be-classic "Otherside of the Game," *Baduizm's* next aural experience to drop on your local radio and video outlets, Lady Badu is headlining this summer's Smokin Grooves tour alongside such folks as the Roots, Foxy Brown, and Papa George Clinton and P-Funk.

Erykah Badu? How'd she get through? Her succinct answer is sarcastic but on the money: "I'm lucky," she tells me one night at Kokobar, a black feminist-owned cybercafé in Afro-chic Fort Greene, Brooklyn, the place she now calls home. "Being righteous is popular this year." Well, it would need to be, wouldn't it? After a year in which the overriding message of black pop culture has been "Get On, Get Paid, and Get Shot," maybe we deserved a break from Murder, Inc. And so, in spite of our sins, the ancestors sent Badu and her *Iem* to help us break out of our genocidal consumptive patterns—and perhaps send a message to the industry that we're down for more in our music than murder, pornography, and prostitution.

But even too much positivity can seem like a bad thing to some people. Badu's already generated a backlash. It actually started early on in my cipher, when otherwise rational, Afrocentric folk would go on and on about Badu's headwraps like she was trying to stuff those piles of fabric down their throats. (You'd think they'd be happy she didn't come out in the red Jheri-curl wig she donned in a grade-school production of *Annie*.)

Now, anytime people flip out like that, you know it's got to be about more than just how *de chile* wears her Africa. Like, Badu being successful without compromising her politics makes them feel ass-out, so they got to find some way to trash her, and thereby save face...yet they fear her just the same. Once word got out that I was doing a Badu interview, heads started rolling at me with all kinds of wacky hearsay, rumors, gossip, and whatnot, like "I heard her daddy was in jail and her mama was off-the-hook," that she hates meat eaters, and that Mary J. Blige thinks she's a witch. What's in that midwifery bag she carries onstage anyway? And is all that nonstop lighting of incense some kind of gimmick or what?

You wanna know? Fine. Here's Badu on...her daddy: "I never knew him, and I don't know much about him." Her mama: "My mother is my best friend. She's always supported me, been there for me, gave me everything I ever needed, and if it was any different, I would say the same thing." Her use of the phrase "Carnivores With Extensions" during live performances: "That was an analogy I used to describe how my music was my baby and how, if I wouldn't let my non-meat-eating, unprocessed-hair baby be raised by someone who did those things, I was going to protect my music in the same way. But that wasn't directed at anyone at my label. Everybody at my label is fly. They're very supportive of me."

On Mary J. Blige: "I love Mary. I tell her I support her no matter what other people might say. I was in London right before she got there and bought her a ring when she got there, just as a sister thing, you know." On her omnipresent bag: "It's just a purse." And finally, on her aura,

SOUTHERN GAL

"My grandmother sang all the time when I was a kid. I pattern myself after her a little bit."



her headwraps and incense being a gimmick: "I'm not perfect. What I wear represents what I'm striving to be every day. But the way I am, that's how I showed up at the label, with my spirit. Even though music is my hustle and I'm a businesswoman, I know the industry is not trying to pacify my spirit. I have to do that."

Fortunately, the 26-year-old Badu, a rapper during her school days who's still known to bust a freestyle onstage, has a sense of humor. After hollering to her entourage to find out whether they had any good dirt on her for VIBE, she offered to make some up for us. "Why don't you tell them I'm not going to make any more albums and just get married to Ahmir, the drummer from the Roots, and have babies." More seriously, though, after a while, she did begin challenging this

trimmed and fertilized and forced to grow in an unnatural way. The high school I went to [Dallas's prestigious Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts] definitely gave me an outlet because you could feel natural and still fit into the system. That's what we struggle through as artists: to fit into the walk of life like everyone else, to make money and still feel like ourselves.

People like [trumpeter] Roy Hargrove and [songstress] Sandra St. Victor also went to your school. Did you have to audition to get in?

Yes. You have to audition and maintain a certain grade point average. It maintains a balance in us. You can only audition for one area, either dance or theater. I got accepted into theater, but the dance teacher got

from it. I also think it's about being considerate of what they've been through and what they have to share with you. I love my grandmothers. They're both still alive, and they both gave a lot to me. They prepared me for this moment, I guess.

Do they give you career advice?

Much advice. More now than ever. They all knew this would happen. My grandmother Ganny was the one who said, "Always pick your friends like you pick your fruit." She told me, "You don't want to lean up against a rotten tree. Your friends are seasonal. If you're not getting along with Coretta the same time every year then y'all ain't right for each other right then. You just get what you get and then go on to the next one. If it's not good for you in that season then



invasive line of questioning. "Do you think that it makes people feel better to hear something bad since so many good things have been written?" Well, Erykah, yeah, in a sick, twisted kind of way, I think it does. "So many positive things have been said that I'm waiting for the negative article," says the new Lady Soul. "Maybe I'm going to have to do something bad now to remain popular."

What did you find nurturing about growing up in the South?

Having the freedom to be an artist, having no boundaries, no role models, and not following no trends. I was able to have my own rules, which is important for an artist because you're immediately an outsider. Fortunately, I was able to grow up without being

mad; so I was one of the only people who could be in both.

Do you come from a music background?

Uh, yeah, radio [Laughs]. My grandmother sang all the time when I was a kid. I pattern myself after her a little bit.

Young folks from the South tend to have more of a relationship and a dialogue with older people than their northern counterparts.

Yes. I can agree with that. I have friends who range in age from five to fifty-five who are all equally intelligent to me. We have a close relationship with my grandmother and other elders in my family. We respect everything they say, even if it's not right and exact, because at different times, there's something to get

don't even try it in that cycle. The universe is going to give gifts."

She taught me to learn cycles, which is mathematics. You just have to learn to survive different cycles. Then the natural order of things will come to you. Go with the wind instead of going against it, and you'll get a lot further. But if my mind is blowing this way and another person's opinion is flowing another way, when I go against them, it might seem like I'm going against the wind, but I'm not. I'm just going my way and not the way they want me to go.

I got another grandmother too, my mother's mother. She tells it like it is. If somebody comes in the house, she'll say straight up, "Oh, he's bad news." You get mad at her, but she knows what she's talking about.

Does she give you romantic advice?

Yeah. She's been around. I-yi-yi. I grew up with my godmother. She's an artist too, a director and an actress. Every summer she had a program where she would put on one-act plays. I was always in them, and I would always get the lead roles—not because I was her goddaughter, but because I was good. The other kids would just look at me like I got special attention; but no, I was just better than them [Laughs].

So were you the kid they made perform every time people came over to the house?

No, I did that on my own. Like, Look y'all, I can do this! When you put a lot of energy into something, you get the energy back. I've always been the type of person who wanted to get that energy back. I've nev-

**I THINK I REPRESENT
AN IMAGE THAT IS NOT
FOCUSED ON BY THE MUSIC
BUSINESS. THEY PROBABLY
DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD
SELL BECAUSE THE MUSIC
BUSINESS AND MUSIC**

think I sound exactly the same. I don't have formal training in music, just dance and theater. I was in musical theater, though; so I have a big voice, because you have to learn how to project. Nobody taught me; it was just the right situation. Now it's effortless. The Creator does it.

How do you feel about being compared to Billie Holiday?

Well, I just look at who Billie Holiday was. She was a singer who was able to reach the back of the room with a slight inflection of her voice. If I'm doing that, cool. That's good. I invite an energy into my music and into my cipher that can help me get my point across.

Do you study other artists' career histories? Look at them as examples of what to do and what not to do?

No, because I think if you're an artist, you're still



er been shy. Although I'm always really nervous right before I do a show. You know that natural nervousness that comes? That anxiety? But I know that it's going to come off right because I believe in this.

Who are some of the performers you try to emulate?

You mean besides Chaka Khan? I used to pretend I was a horn all the time. That came from listening to Miles Davis and Bird and Al Jarreau with my uncle. Me and my brother and sister used to pretend we were a band. I'd be the horn, and my sister would be the bass. Stevie Wonder is another person I tried to imitate. But I could never get the vibrato in my voice that Stevie Wonder has, no matter how hard I tried.

Did something original develop out of the trying?

I've got tapes from when I was five years old, and I

**ARE TWO DIFFERENT
THINGS. ONE IS MOTIVATED
BY MONEY AND ONE IS
MOTIVATED BY TRUTH.
THE TRUTH DOESN'T
SELL A LOT OF TIMES.
LIES SELL.**

a human being. Our lives are kind of magnified because it seems like fun to other people. Is it fun to me to have my life magnified? Yes, because this is the energy I want to give back. I love it. I really do. Fortunately, I haven't been a victim of negative energy.

What inspired "On & On"?

The vocal style was inspired by the beats. The lyrics were inspired by the gods and the earths, the mathematics and the science I was learning at the time. Not arithmetic, but the physics of life. I had four minutes to get all of that into one song—everything that I had ever wanted to say about the good things that happened, and the knowledge I had acquired up to that point. When I wrote that song, I was looking for a melody and words with the right syllables to fit into

that melody. That song basically wrote itself. I just had to do a little fine-tuning.

Tell me about the video for "Next Lifetime."

That's just something in my head I came up with. And we made it work. My friend Jennifer, who helped me with my last video, said you ought to do it life to life, and you'll have a different guy in each lifetime. You'll be a G. And I said, How am I gonna be a G and still be righteous?

[Laughing] Gangsta of truth.

Right, a divine pimp. So we've got three lifetimes in three verses. The video starts out in Africa, in the 1600s, then it goes to 1961 America. The next lifetime is 3037, which is very similar to the year 1600, 'cause that's when we went back to our natural ways. Everything is much greener. Chlorophyll is the national drink. We're all healthy and we're beautiful.

I don't like people who say "no, no, Erykah." I don't like nobody trying to kill your ideas 'cause they doubt themselves. That's tired to me.

When you talk about "gods and earths" and "mathematics," what are you talking about?

I'm talking about the teachings of Clarence X. He came from the Nation of Islam, and he founded an organization called the Five Percent Nation, which means five percent in the sense that five percent of the people in the world have knowledge of self and understand like we understand. Ten percent profit off of that information and just preach it to gain fame for themselves. Eighty-five percent follow or don't know or don't care. So that's the percentage part. I thought that was a smart philosophy.

How did you find out about it?

When I was at Grambling State, it was a big dad. Everybody had these books with a seven and a crescent on them. In high school, I learned a lot about myself. Anything that was about me, I wanted to know. Like, what is that? I want to see that. Seeking the knowledge, I acquired it. I'm not a part of the organization because I don't think any one organization can define your relationship with the Creator. But I memorized and understood all the information, and I use it every day, just like I use Christian proverbs and text, Islamic proverbs and text, and Buddhist proverbs and text. Anything I can use to learn about me. I think the Creator loves that we understand to get a foundation and then to build from there. I don't stifle my creativity or my will to learn. My religion, if I have one, is probably the arts.

Charlie Parker said something like that. He said he was a devout musician.

Oh, really? Well, I show my love and dedication to the Creator most through my art, pay homage like that, because I know it's not me doing it all. Whatever I do, I try to make it right and exact. It has to feel right for me. I've had a conscience since I was about three or four years old. We all have consciences. That's all we've got. I knew right from wrong at five years old. I could look at people, like, Oh, she ain't gonna make it. There's no way. I could just feel it.

Were people intimidated by you as a child?

No. My mother used to say I had a smart mouth

because I would say everything that I knew. She'd say stuff like, "I'm twenty-five; you're five. I been here longer than you." But I remember getting up in the morning and doing what I needed to do and feeling very responsible for myself.

How do you feel about the images of other black women that are available in popular media today? Do you see yourself as representing an alternative?

I think I represent an image that is not focused on by the music business. They probably didn't think it would sell because the music business and music are two different things. One is motivated by money and one is motivated by truth. The truth doesn't sell a lot of times. Lies sell.

Money—if that's your motivation you gotta do what you gotta do. If healing people is your motivation, you may not sell a lot of records. But what if you got both of them as your motivation? That's my point—they're

**"THE FORMULA IS
FEEL IT. AND PEOPLE
FEEL IT BECAUSE
PEOPLE ARE REAL.
I DON'T UNDERESTIMATE
MY AUDIENCE. I TREAT
THEM LIKE INTELLIGENT
PEOPLE WHO CAN
UNDERSTAND WHAT
I'M SAYING."**

equal. It goes together. You gotta understand what you're getting into all the time. Not be so spiritually guided that you're blind. Not be so monetarily guided that you're blind. This is real, man. This is life.

I think other women feel what they're doing. I mean, if your information is limited and that's all that you have to give, you still feel what you're doing. It's not always our fault that we don't have access to all the information that we really need; but we have to, at some point, take responsibility for ourselves. We have to realize that having a Lexus is not succeeding in life. That's just success on the physical level. I want nice things; I deserve nice things. But I'm balanced. I still ride the subway trains.

I know the weight of physical things, and I understand the weight of the celestial plane as well. We are on Earth to experience the consequences of our choices. And what I choose to do I know is going to

come back, because it has time and time again since I was a child. If you don't learn from the same mistakes that you keep repeating over and over and over, you'll be looking ass out all the time. If you don't have a desire for knowledge or going to the next level, those things that are no good for you will keep lingering around.

What are your feelings about the murders of Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur?

[In a quiet and weary voice] I'm just tired, you know? Maybe I expect too much, I don't know. I know the reality of the situation, and no one thing is going to change a whole nation. But I thought that was over. I know that negativity is always going to be around; but the government is killing us, so why... I'm angry at the school system, because we should have more information. I'm angry with the churches. I'm angry that the people who have the power to give information don't tell us anything. Yeah, we have to survive, but there's so much more we need to know and don't. And we think we're supposed to react because of our emotions.

I feel sad for us and hip hop. I'm a Pisces. I feel responsible for everybody and everything. Then again, I feel lost sometimes, because that's the way it's supposed to be, I guess. I knew Biggie. He was cool to me. But sometimes, you speak things into existence. I know I do. I said I was going to get a record deal, and grow a seed, and continue to pursue positive images and make a change. Biggie said he was ready to die.

Sometimes, if you're poor, you're put in a situation I fortunately wasn't put into. We were poor, but I had the kind of surroundings that made a difference. Ghettos are the same all over the world. They might look a little different, but they've all got the same mentality. I looked around, and I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to be on welfare. I'd rather be a delinquent on the street than to answer to the government all the time. I'd never let anyone infiltrate my dreams. If I couldn't create, I wouldn't be in this business. Even if I didn't have a deal, I'd still be doing it.

Artists such as yourself, D'Angelo, Mr. \$ib, NdegeOcello, and Maxwell have all brought live bands and performance back into black popular music. Do you feel any sort of kinship with them?

I don't think we sound anything alike. We just vibrate on the same level. We're all about the same age, and we come from the '70s soul feel. That's just what we understand as music, and we're just now coming to light in the business. The formula is feel it. And people feel it because people are real. I don't underestimate my audience. I treat them like intelligent people who can understand what I'm saying.

A lot of artists in hip hop patronize their audience.

They're just trying to survive. I don't know, man. It's sad that since music is so important to us as a people, we have to use music as the hope for everything. But when I do a show, I stay until the chairs are on the tables, and I sign autographs for every single person, up to the person who's behind the bar. I guess it's the Creator's force that gives me that extra burst of energy. I never get tired of writing inspirational words. ■



BADU TO THE BONE
"Some very positive things
have been said, maybe I'm
going to have to do something
bad now to remain popular."

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CLIP

ORGANIZED KONFUSION

Balancing act

"WE'RE BACK, FOLKS—BUT THIS time out, there will be no more stress," declares Organized Konfusion's Prince Poetry, speaking into a microphone at New York's WKCR radio station. During this 3 a.m. trek to hip hop's underground mainstay *The DJ Stretch Armstrong Show*, Poetry and his rhymemate Pharoahe Monch dispel any notion that Organized Konfusion's latest album, *The Equinox*, revisits the feel of their previous opus, the highly praised *Stress: The Extinction Agenda*. "We're finding other ways to relieve the stress," continues Po, "so we can focus on other priorities."

Back in south Jamaica, Queens, where Poetry, 27, and Monch, 26, grew up, the duo talk about their two-year battle to separate from the Disney-owned Hollywood/Basic. According to Monch, Basic wasn't willing to put the bucks—or the confidence—into OK's self-titled 1991 debut or 1994's *Stress* (both considered bona fide classics). "When *Stress* came out, they [Hollywood] felt it," Monch says. "Then afterwards, they got scared and felt there wasn't a following. When they started second-guessing the project, it just made things worse."

After severing ties with Hollywood/Basic, Organized Konfusion landed a sweet deal with Priority Records, where several key ex-Basic staffers had paved the way for their arrival. Signing under their newly formed Medicine Men production company, Monch and Po were able to obtain ownership of their publishing for future projects. "This time around we have an understanding with the label," Poetry explains. "It's only us who can draw the line between making money and being creative with what we're making money off of."

And the end result of that balance, *The Equinox*, shows that OK are definitely maintaining their unparalleled level of creativity. While solidly conceptual, dealing with "good and bad equally meeting" in a man's life, the album proves that Poetry and Monch can still fly cerebral metaphors as compelling as hand grenades: "Pharoahe, I could burn some of the most faithful MCs like the million bicolors. I've got even tangible for them to understand I hold the weight." No stress? No question.

Marcus Reeves

Pharoahe Monch, Prince Poetry

PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN MANNION

mj on:
ARTS & CRAFTS

"Why be like me?

Be like **you.**

Go outside the lines. It may take
everything you've got.

So remember the **art**
of putting it back."

Life is a sport.
Drink it up.





DIRECTOR JOHN WOO

THE GODFATHER OF

HARD-BOILED BULLET

BALLETS IS AIMING TO

ENTER THE WOO

OUTDO himself yet

AGAIN WITH HIS

LATEST ACTION FLICK,

FACE/OFF.

BY JEFF YANG



Chow Yun-Fat in *The Killer*

How do you recognize a master? A master may be recognized by three signs:

First, his skills will be legendary and his style unique.

Hallucinogenic slow-mo. Snap-cut montages. Tightly choreographed gunplay that coaxes wild beauty out of extreme violence.

Second, he will attract disciples, and his fame will spread like fire through a tenement.

Hollywood legend has it that Quentin Tarantino was making a pitch at the office of this studio exec, and the suit, wanting to make an impression, said to Q.T., "Just the other day, I had this guy in from Hong Kong—John Woo. I heard he's pretty good with action scenes." Hearing this, Tarantino snapped back, "Yeah, and I heard Michelangelo's pretty good at painting ceilings."

And third, he will be recognized by other masters and given a master's respect.

"John Woo's movies comb the fibers of the brain like a mental massage," raves RZA of the Wu-Tang Clan. "His action scenes seem to be in four dimensions, way past the second dimension of the screen."

John Woo is Hong Kong's most explosive cinematic export. The noise bringer. The gunslinger. The director who invented the running firefight as break battle, with combatants going head-to-head in acrobatic ballistic ballets. His 1986 Hong Kong classic *A Better Tomorrow* was a brooding masterpiece that reimagined the gangsta as a two-gun urban knight, a sleek avenger in mirror shades and a sweeping black duster. His 1989 rave-up *The Killer* confirmed him as the dean of the new school of Hong Kong action cool while inspiring cult worship among American fans who rocked to its gritty scenes of inspired violence and rolled to its themes of honor and vengeance—white-boy videodrones like Quentin T., hardcore hip hop hustlers like the Wu-Tang, Asiatic brothers wondering what took the others so long to recognize.

"John Woo has dared to raise action to an art form," says John Travolta, star of Woo's 1996 Hollywood epic *Broken Arrow* and a full-on convert to the cult of Woo.

"He's a visual stylist—a signature director whose command of cinema is immediately apparent," agrees Nicolas Cage. "He takes violence so far beyond reality that it becomes almost a visceral poetry."

This July, Travolta and Cage are scheduled to ride Woo's latest joint, *Face/Off*, into theaters across the nation. The film takes the themes that have dominated Woo's work—the essence of manhood, the binding nature of loyalty, the blinding nature of love—and blows them up. Travolta stars as Sean Archer, a driven cop who undergoes experimental surgery in order to run the ultimate undercover op—switching faces and identities with his nemesis, Castor Troy, a murderous terrorist played by Cage. When Troy, wearing Archer's face, breaks loose and infiltrates his

enemy's home and family, the stage is set for a collision best measured on the Richter scale: *Swimming helicopter dogfights. Full-throttle powerboat chases through the port of L.A. Cage and Travolta, chewing scenery and spitting lead.*

Face/Off is a big film—maybe the biggest in Woo's career. Big for Paramount because the studio has bet the farm that Woo can uncork *Broken Arrow*'s \$148 million bottled lightning all over again. Big for Woo, because for the first time he has complete creative control in Hollywood, giving him the chance to prove to old-school fans that he can live large and keep it real. And big for adrenaline junkies everywhere, because if the Master succeeds in bringing his vision—a Hollywood blockbuster with a Hong Kong heart—to culmination, the results should nip the doors off the action genre and sling audiences screaming across the threshold. In short, Woo is a man under pressure. A man under the gun.

Not that you'd know this from looking at him. When he rolls into his office on the Paramount lot unannounced, offering a quick smile to his assistant and a soft apology for running late, it's like that scene from *Wizard of Oz* where they pull the curtain on the Emerald City ruler. Art and life couldn't be farther apart. Onscreen, Woo's characters move with amphetamine velocity, sliding down banisters, crashing through sheet glass, and flipping horizontally through a storm of lead, *both pistols blazing*. In person, John Woo, 51, is small and sardonic, with rounded shoulders, thinning hair, and the benevolent look of a favorite uncle. In halting English, he admits he's never shot a gun in his life.

"Actually, I despise violence," he says. "And I have never known any real gangsters—I only know about gangs from books and movies. And from getting beat up by them when I was a child."

In fact, the only thing Woo has in common with his heroes—besides a taste for Marlboro Whites—is an uncanny ability to project quiet, absolute confidence. Wherever he goes, he's an island of calm, the eye of the storm. This is a survivor's skill, learned through experience and necessity—first as a child growing up in desperate poverty and then as a rising star in the anything-goes world of Hong Kong film.

Woo was born in 1946 in Guangzhou, China, the son of a high-placed official in the Nationalist Army. After the defeat of the Nationalists and the takeover of the mainland by Mao's People's Liberation Army of China in 1949, Woo's father fled to Hong Kong, where he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. The elder Woo was hospitalized and unable to work, and his penniless family was forced out onto the streets. "We were homeless for years," says Woo. "My mother worked at a construction site pounding rocks to earn a little money so we could survive."

The word Woo uses to describe his childhood is *hell*. "We had nothing. We were surrounded by drug dealers, gamblers, junkies, and hookers," he says. "We were so poor that I couldn't go to school until I was nine years old. But even though we were poor, my mother could still afford to take me to the cinema." In the flickering light of Hollywood's black-and-white classics,



John Woo says he



Cage and Travolta rework a classic pose in *Face/Off*.

Woo found a way to escape, if only for a few hours. "I found my dreams in the movies, especially the musicals. Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire," Woo remembers. "They dressed well, people cared about one another, and everything was beautiful. They were like paradise."

To the young Woo, the movies became a ticket to the future. At the age of 11, he'd take pieces of glass and paint pictures on them with ink: Western cowboys, ancient Chinese heroes and monsters. "I'd cover myself with a blanket and shine a flashlight through the glass to project the image on a white wall," he says. "When I moved the light up and down, it looked like the image on the wall was moving. That was how I decided I wanted to make films."

Charity from a local church gave Woo the opportunity to go to high school, where he studied drama and acted in plays to overcome his awkward shyness, but the end of high school meant the end of Woo's formal education. "That was okay. I learned what I needed to know from watching movies, and from my father," he says. "Even though I was sick, he taught me a lot about Chinese tradition, about the ideas of Confucius and warrior morality." The elder Woo drummed two lessons into his young son, lessons that John would never forget. The first was: Never let anyone look down on you. And the second: Stand up for what you believe—for your friends, for your brothers, for your family. A man should always stand up.

After high school, Woo immersed himself in Hong Kong's emerging bohemia, living with friends who shared his taste for cinema. He saved enough money doing odd jobs to make short experimental films, hoping someday to get the chance to work in the movies for real. "In the '60s, if you didn't know anyone in the business or if you weren't related to anyone, it was really hard to get into the film industry," he says. "The people who ran the studios learned how to make films from experience; they never went to school. And they thought of artist types like us as intellectuals. They hated us."

Woo got his first break at age 23, when a childhood friend got him a job at Cathay Films, a small production company specializing in soap operas and musical melodramas. "The films were terrible," he says. "They were all period movies, very soft, very repetitious." In 1971, after a year as a script supervisor at Cathay, Woo jumped to Shaw Brothers to work for Hong Kong's most volatile and talented director, Chang Cheh—creator of such kung-fu classics as *Vengeance*, *The Five Deadly Venoms*, and *The One Armed Swordsman*. Under Chang, Woo was schooled in the art of action while becoming immersed in ancient legends of the fist and the blade. He carefully nursed the idea of someday updating the stories of the secret martial brotherhoods, framing them in a modern setting, such as the criminal underworld.

In 1973 Woo helmed his first film, *The Young Dragons*, and then signed a contract with Golden Harvest, the upstart studio that had ridden to the top of the industry food chain on the mighty back of Bruce Lee. His first three releases—a pair of martial arts films and a Chinese opera titled *Princess Chang Ping*—flatlined at the box office. Remembering his dream, he suggested to the studio the idea of making a gangster film. "But they said, 'Those movies aren't the trend—the trend is comedies,'" he recalls. "I said, 'I'm not really a comedy guy. They made me do it anyway.'"

Woo's comedy debut, *Money Crazy*, was released in 1976. Despite a tissue-thin budget and a script that took him just two weeks to write, it was a huge hit, and Woo was trapped. "After that, the studio just wanted me to keep making comedies," he says. "I was in a rage. I had so much anger at society because I could see poverty and unfairness, and people dying in war, but the only thing they wanted me to do was make people laugh. Since I couldn't make the movies I wanted, I began



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using my films as a weapon—they became bitter laugh comedies. People were confused. They were saying, 'It looks like a comedy, but there's so much anger here. It's so depressing.'"

Woo's box-office popularity collapsed, and his peers began questioning whether his career was over. "Some people were saying, 'John Woo is finished, he should stay home and watch videotapes—learn how to make movies all over again,'" he says. "It was hard to get support to do films anymore."

When he left Hong Kong for Taiwan, in 1984, Woo found no better luck. But when he returned, discouraged, a year later, he found that everything had changed. "The younger generation seemed to be lost," he says. "They had become rootless, they were rude; they only cared about imitating foreign idols. I felt the need to make a film that would send them a message, to bring out something that has been gone for a long time: true values, like honor and chivalry. I wanted to show them what my father taught me: that a man should stand up for himself and for others."

Woo knew it was time for the movie he'd always wanted to make. With the assistance of his former protégé Tsui Hark, who had risen to become one of Hong Kong's top producer/directors, Woo was able to obtain the funds to create *A Better Tomorrow*, a dark, accelerated opus about brotherhood and betrayal, set in Hong Kong's criminal underworld. *Tamorrow* broke all H.K. box-office records, became an international cult hit, and proved to the world that *no one* should ever look down on John Woo.

Ten years and 30 movies later, Woo has joined Hollywood's directorial A-list, and any treatment that features larger-than-life heroes and hollow-point mayhem is automatically forwarded to his attention. He's the Mack. The Action Man. And like any true master, Woo has developed lethal and unexpected moves at every turn. In the old kung-fu classics, when challenged by the Snake Fist, the

"I DESPISE VIOLENCE," SAYS WOO. "I ONLY KNOW ABOUT GANGS FROM BOOKS AND MOVIES. AND FROM GETTING BEAT UP BY THEM WHEN I WAS A CHILD."

creative warrior would come with Crane Style; when met with Crane, he would bring on the Mantis; just when you thought you knew his limits, he would show a new and unexpected face.

For the ever-evolving Woo, *Face/Off* is not only the ultimate expression of his action achievements but also an attempt to give new life to his classic theme of brotherly battle royale. "I don't want people to think of *Face/Off* as just an action movie," he says. "This movie is complex; it has great drama, a great story. It says something about human nature." It also says something about Woo's latest interest: domestic life. *Face/Off*'s hero has a wife (played by Joan Allen) and a daughter—strong female characters who serve as the fulcrum of the film's twisting plot.

Since Woo's move to Hollywood, home and family have taken on new importance in both his art and his life. "When I was in Hong Kong, I would work seven days a week, eighteen hours a day," he says. "My children barely recognized me. Now, I don't work on weekends. After work, I go home and spend time with my children."

So is the godfather of hard-boiled hysteria getting soft? After all, his slate for the future includes what he calls a "romantic caper flick" that will reunite him with his cinematic muse, actor Chow Yun-Fat; a tongue-in-cheek TV mystery series titled *Once a Thief*; and an 18th-century period project with Tom Cruise, tentatively called *Devil Soldier*. All seem like worthy projects but, compared to the megaton boom of *Face/Off* and *Broken Arrow*, sort of... quiet. "My next project will be different—a family thing, perhaps a light romantic comedy," he agrees, reclining on the leather couch in his office and pulling a Marlboro from a crumpled softpack. "But first I must finish *Face/Off*."

He smiles mischievously and exhales a little plume of smoke. "The only real action scene in *Broken Arrow* was the fight on the train. In *Face/Off* we will have gang fights, boat chases, plane crashes. The action in *Face/Off* will be... big." □

ENTRY WOUNDS

FIVE JOHN WOO FLICKS YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

• The box-office record-breaking *A Better Tomorrow* (1986)—a hyperstylish epic of Triad loyalty, two-fisted gun spray, and brotherly love—established Woo and his favorite action hero, Chow Yun-Fat, as the Scorsese and De Niro of Southeast Asia.

• *A Better Tomorrow 2* (1988) repeated the formula—slow motion sentimentality and high-caliber male bonding—but tripled the body count: Once Chow and his blood brothers don their *Reservoir Dogs* threads, all bets are off, and the movie's untoppable climax dips everything from flailing junkies and flying gangsters to rocket launchers and medieval-on-your-ass battle-axes in its baptismal fount of gore.



• *The Killer* (1989) is the Woo-Chow team's crowning glory. One slick hit man and one determined cop go mano a mano—semiautomatics trained on each other's foreheads—in a hailstorm of hot lead, hard-boiled longing, and heavy Christian symbolism: This is what it looks like when doves die.

• *Bullet in the Head* (1990)—love it or hate it, there's no middle ground—is Woo's most personal work. What starts out looking like *Hong Kong Happy Days* turns into a nerve-shredding rethink of *The Deer Hunter*; its portrait of the Vietnam War is head-wound history of the darkest order.

• *For Hard-Boiled* (1992), his last H.K. film, Woo pulls out all the stops. The opening tea-house shoot-out may be the best gun battle ever filmed, but the movie's real money shot involves, believe it or not, the world's most timely stream of baby piss.

Chuck Stephens



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BIG

TOP

**Photographs by
Erin Patrice O'Brien**

Russell Lark Brown
The 40-year veteran jester came out of retirement for the UniversOUL Big Top. "I had thrown away my shoes, and I was giving away my costumes. What—an all-black circus? Wait a minute....This is a dream come true."

It's all here under one tent—elephants, tigers, acrobats, kids, popcorn—but this time it's a little different: The performers are black, the music is funky—hey, this place has soul! The UniverSOUL Big Top Circus is the first black-owned and -operated circus since the 1890s. Now touring nationally in its fourth season, the circus is the brainchild of Cedric "Ricky" Walker and "Casual" Cal Dupree (who doubles as ringmaster), the former rap promoters who brought you the FreshFest back in 1984. Just like in all circuses, the heart of this show is the laughing, brightly colored clowns, who are ready to lend a smile to every child, or adult, in the house.

Dyani Sexton

Kevin Terrell Johnson
"What do I like best about being a clown? The creative freedom; just being myself, basically. I've been a clown all my life. I just didn't realize it."





Danlee Payne
Ringling Brothers' first
black female clown.
"Traditionally, the clown
world is a white man's
world. This is the first
show I've been on where
I look out and I see
reflections of myself out
there. It's for us by us."

Why the makeup?
"When people ask, I say,
You don't know your history,
brother. This is Us! This is
disfavored. When African
villages have festivals,
what do they put on their
faces? The Indians can
wear makeup, Africans
wear makeup; but when an
American black man puts
on makeup, it's different.
Why is that?"





WREKONIZ
"In life, you don't get
what you want," says
Buck. "You get what
you need to live."

no call

Aside from being one half of Heltah Skeltah and the Boot Camp Click representative with the funniest jokes, Sean Price is one cool hombre. But mention those naysayers who suggest that the MCs trained in his BCC squadron sound too similar to distinguish, and the lyric warrior better known as Ruck is ready to bring the ruckus.

"That's bullshit, man!" he declares, sitting at the far corner of the scuffed conference room inside Priority Records' N.Y.C. headquarters, a sour look on his grill as he slows up his perusal of the *New York Post*. His cohort in combat, the dreadlocked, scar-faced Rock, who's sitting nearby, gulps down a fruit drink, seemingly unfazed.

"How the fuck you can't

Mr. Rippa) and Steele (a.k.a. Mr. Vicksta) of Da Cocoa Brovaz (formerly Smif-N-Wessun but forced to change their name after legal hassles with the Smith & Wesson gun company); Heltah Skeltah (Rock and Ruck); Originoo Gunn Clappaz's Starang Wondah, Louisville Sluggah, and Top Dog Da Big Kahuna. Believe it or not, still on deck and featured on the new joint are fresh troops Representativez, Illa Noyz, and Buck Town Juvenilez.

Crooklyn's nocturnal bombers, in full-scale invasion mode, land in waves on this lackadaisical afternoon. The video for "Heads R Red," featuring the BCC kin in a *Rocky* takeoff under the moniker the Great 8, plays repeatedly on a giant-screen TV. Minutes later, Dru Ha,

cords, this revered icon of underground authenticity has managed, much like Wu-Tang's RZA, to reemerge from label limbo to establish his own dynasty. Buck looks haggard, obviously fatigued from the previous night's session.

"[The problem with my first contract] was money, years, terms. It was so much bullshit. I refused to make another album," says the B.D. Eye, who signed with Nervous Records at age 17. The experience sharpened his insight into the biz. "In life, you don't get what you earn. You don't get what you owed. You don't get what you work for. You get what you negotiate."

(Nervous president Michael Weiss claims that in February 1993, Buck admit-

BOOT CAMP CLIK'S GOT SOMETHING FOR THE PEOPLE. BY GABRIEL ALVAREZ. PHOTOGRAPHS BY PHIL KNOTT

tell us [him and Rock] from Tek and Steele?" continues Ruck, who's rocking an azure-emerald-hued 'do-rag and a gargantuan ring on his left pinky. "How the fuck you can't tell me and son from O.G.C.? I just think they got dicks in their mouth." Rock flicks a bottle cap in the air and clarifies: "Or in they ear."

A live organ lodged in your aural cavity is exactly what to expect from the inaugural Boot Camp Click compilation, the long-anticipated *For the People*. No, not a real booz, but an actual organ, alongside keyboards, guitars, and bass. Live instrumentation has replaced the signature Beatminerz beats, perhaps in a shrewd attempt to circumvent costly sample clearances. After all, this fam's got mad mouths to feed.

For those who simply ain't ready for so many heads, a BCC roll call—starting from 1993's launching pad, Black Moon's seminal *Enta da Stage*—goes like this: leader Buckshot from the now defunct Black Moon; Tek (a.k.a.

one of Duck Down Records' head honchos, rambles in with Top Dog of O.G.C. long enough to pub yet another record. "We have a lot of albums comin' out," says a deadpan Dru. "You got any beats?"

Just as Dru Ha exits, Cocoa Bro Steele enters the ring. With Tek in the studio all night, the man who christened Boot Camp Click is reppin' his infantry solo. Saddled up in a chair, the newly nicknamed Good Reverend ("Some dudes say I get to preachin' around here") displays his knack for celluloid symbolism. Film-savvy viewers who peeped S-N-W's 1995 video for "Wontime" no doubt caught the plot's ode to Stanley Kubrick's horror landmark, *The Shining*. "I like movies that drop science," explains Steele, "like *Forrest Gump*. To me, that's one for the history books. That was like the story of Jesus Christ."

Buckshot, the B.D. Eye MC, is the final BCC commando to surface today. Co-CEO of Duck Down Re-

ted that he lied when he signed the contract claiming to be 18. According to Weiss, he informed the rapper that the contract was not valid and renegotiated another deal. He also adds: "[Buck] was being advised constantly that he should have attorneys and management.")

Ending his self-imposed exile, Buckshot returns to group status with da Night (featuring him and three female singers who call themselves Exhale) and appears on *For the People*. Buckshot also covered brilliantly Rakim Allah's classic "I Ain't No Joke" for *Funkmaster Flex Presents the Mix Tape Volume 2: 60 Minutes of Funk*.

Speaking of jokes, humor is one trait that has definitely helped Buck retain his lucid focus on life. "I do different impressions of a lot of business people," laughs the man behind the keen impersonation of an overzealous record exec on O.G.C.'s "Boom...Boom...Prick."

"But I really can't say their names," he says. "They wouldn't really find that funny." □

In the mid-'80s, before Jamiroquai had even begun shopping for their trademark chapeaux, the Brothers International—which consisted of fellow Brits/childhood friends Jan Kincaid, Andrew Levy, and Simon Bartholomew—were dropping '70s-tinged chunky funk to an enthusiastic audience of "rare groove" followers in England. After adding to the mix a brazen Stateside label known for its Delicious Vinyl and a saucy Atlanta-born vocalist named N'Dea

Davenport, the Brothers—rechristened the Brand New Heavies—were on their way to worldwide prominence, buoyed by their 1990 self-titled debut, which spawned the break-through hits "Never Stop" and "Dream Come True."

Now it's 1997, and things done changed. In the three years since the Heavies' third album, *Brother Sister*, made its mark, Davenport has amicably departed to pursue solo projects. Her replacement? Siedah Garrett, best known for cowriting Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror," and as the voice opposite the Gloved One

on "I Just Can't Stop Loving You" and Dennis Edwards' landmark 1984 funkfest "Don't Look Any Further." And judging from Garrett's inclusion on *Shelter*, the Heavies' fourth release, it appears that change is good.

thanks in part to Garrett's fiery delivery and adept pen as cowriter on several tracks, including "You Are the Universe" and "Sometimes," the album's catchy first single.

BRAND NEW HEAVIES

Change is good

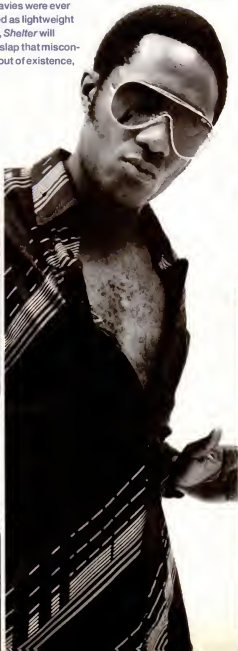
The Heavies' comeback is a stunning cornucopia of euphoric melodies, sleek sensuality, and stellar funk. If the Heavies were ever perceived as lightweight Brit soul, *Shelter* will soundly slap that misconception out of existence,

Writing pop-tinged soul songs for Jackson during his halcyon days—not to mention a long stint collab-

orating with musicmaster Quincy Jones—holds a lot of weight in music circles. But Garrett grew tired of playing second fiddle. "I was slumming it," she says, clearly thrilled about her ascent into the spotlight. "It's much better this way. I was always in the background; but with the Heavies, I'm a complete member."

While funkified fans old and new revel in the band's excellent new collection, should we anticipate an eventual union of Heavies' divas past and present? "Mmmm, no," Garrett says with a smirk. "It's a new regime now. There would be a clash of the Titans.... It wouldn't be pretty!" June Joseph

HEAVY HITTERS
From left: Siedah Garrett,
Simon Bartholomew,
Andrew Levy, Jan Kincaid



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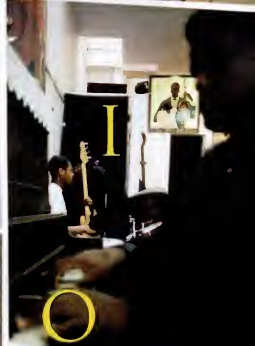
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EVERY LITURGY AT SAN FRANCISCO'S ST. JOHN COLTRANE AFRICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IS A BAPTISM IN SOUND

During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music. I feel this has been granted through His grace. ALL PRAISE TO GOD.

—John Coltrane, from the liner notes to 1964's *A Love Supreme*

Sunday morning and a small storefront buzzes with several dozen people packed onto seven wooden pews. Bright murals are on the walls: trees, sunbeams, and soaring angels; a brown-skinned, dreadlocked Christ, draped in blue and purple garments, reclining on a large throne. The next panel depicts a halo'ed, white-robed image of John Coltrane holding a golden saxophone that breathes fire from its bell. A scroll unfurled from his other hand reads: LET US SING ALL SONGS TO GOD TO WHOM ALL PRAISE IS DUE... PRAISE GOD.

At the back of the room, a wiry young drummer wearing a Che Guevara T-shirt and a baby fro taps a gentle rhythm on an old kit. Next to him, a lady in overalls sits on a stool, balancing an electric bass in her lap. He makes eye contact with her and nods. She shifts her weight slightly and begins plucking a steady line of notes. A multiethnic group of women and children in the front pew stand up and start to sway with the beat.

Behind the bassist, a dark velvet curtain parts, and a tall, bespectacled black man steps into the room. He's dressed regally in a long fuchsia robe with a sash and a white-tabbed priest's collar. A matching cloth crown rests atop his head, and a large silver cross swings from his neck. He raises a pearly conch shell to his mouth, leans back, and blows a solemn call.

This is Bishop Franco Wayne King, saxophonist, theologian, "minister of sound," and founder of San Francisco's St. John Coltrane African Orthodox Church. Here, in this room, every Sunday and Wednesday, King leads a congregation of hardcore Coltrane Disciples, spiritual seekers, and curious onlookers into what he calls "spiritual warfare." Each service is a marathon of testimony, song, and prayer aimed at tipping the balance in the eternal struggle of good against evil. And each service is guided

by, centered around, and directed through the words and music of sax legend Coltrane.

"The handclap in praise of the Lord," the bishop says, "is like thunder in the ears of Satan!" Raised by a family of Pentecostal preachers, King speaks with fiery conviction. His vocal pattern, though, still carries a cool inflection from his days as a hep cat musician and hairdresser.

Mother Marina, King's wife, and Sister Mary Deborah, a tranquil-looking, dreadlocked woman in a black nun's habit, begin softly singing the words "John Coltrane" again and again. One by one, the other choir members echo the refrain. Snapping fingers, clapping hands, they raise the volume with each repetition. The bishop and Father De Haven—a goateed white man, also robed—pick up saxophones and kneel before a candlelit

altar. While they pray, heads bowed, a burly pianist joins the rhythm, and then a bongo drummer. Sister Mary Deborah lifts her right hand and leads the choir in a recitation of Psalm 23. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," they sing to the melody of Coltrane's 1964 "Acknowledgement," "I will fear no evil. / For Thou art with me. / Thy rod and Thy staff / They comfort me...."

King first gathered his flock in the 1960s, operating a secular "listening clinic" out of his living room. It was known as the Yardbird Club, after bebop innovator Charlie "Yardbird" Parker, and was designed to educate the community about what Bishop

King refers to as "African classical so-called jazz music."

Shortly before John Coltrane died from liver cancer in 1967, King and Mother Marina saw him play at San Francisco's Jazz Workshop—an experience they refer to as their "baptism in sound." From then on, the listening clinic took on a religious atmosphere and was referred to as the Yardbird Temple.

After the ceremony, I sit in the back of the church with King. The bishop has shed his robe and now wears a priest's black suit. His cramped study is cluttered with books and papers. Framed photographs of Bob Marley, Malcolm X, and, of course, Coltrane hang on the walls. "When we went to see Coltrane," King says, "and began to understand who he was and



BY DAVID BRY. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFFERY NEWBURY

what he was representing in terms of God, we realized that we didn't need a club, we actually needed a temple—a sacred place of prayer."

Collecting alms at street ministries, selling homemade juice, and offering garbage pickups, the temple raised money for a "physical edifice." In 1969 they found a location on Divisadero Street in the Haight district. Two years later, they opened to the public as the One Mind Temple Evolutionary Transitional Body of Christ. "To us," King says, "John was like the Christ—the anointed, the spirit of God. Coltrane had songs titled 'Evolution' and 'Transition'; we took those together and said we had to evolve and transcend into Christ-like beings. And we felt that John's music had the power to assist us in that."

The sax-bearing clergymen rise from the red carpet, turn to the band, and start blowing in time. An improvisational "free" jam goes spiraling off toward the heavens. The horns squeal sheets of wind over a hailstorm of drumbeats. The pianist pounds the keys with elbows and clenched fists. The bishop points at his musicians and singers, urging them on, calling for solos or fills. "You gotta work," he says between his own licks. "The prayin's in the playin'!"

Mother Marina stands encircled by the rest of the choir. Eyes closed, arms raised, she wails in a strange tongue. Parishioners who've come equipped join the noise with guitars and trombones, flutes, and foot stomping. Children shake tambourines. Adults dance 'round in circles, shouting in exaltation.

Out of the chaos, four solid bass notes restore order.

There's a moment of hushed anticipation, then the other instruments get hold of the groove, and then the choir and congregation are drawn in. Everybody knows this one. *The Chant*, it says in the service's prayer pamphlet: "A Love Supreme." A wave of voices, searching the scales, cresting, and falling: Three words. Change pitch. Repeat. Four beats. Change pitch. Repeat: "A love supreme / A love supreme."

Some spirit definitely has hold of the church. The Holy Ghost or 'Trane's ghost. Or both. But is this really religion—or merely a concert played before a die-hard fan club? And why Coltrane? When he was alive, some critics straight-up called him insane. They accused him of ruining an art form with his noisy, self-indulgent free jazz. He was divorced. He had a famous drinking problem and a heroin addiction that got him kicked out of Miles Davis's group (so you *know* it was bad). You're gonna build a church around this man?

"People'll argue and say, 'Why Coltrane?'" says King. "He used heroin." And I say, Yes, *used*, in the past tense. The beauty of it is that he overcame that. We like to say that John Coltrane went to hell while he was using heroin. But he didn't just go there, say hello to the devil, and get a pass to come home. God liberated him from his addiction. He went to hell and came back with the keys to heaven. And those keys can be accessed in his sound, so that others can be freed as well."

But plenty of people have kicked drugs—what makes Coltrane's music inspire religious veneration? "It's in the intent," King explains. "Miles once said, 'If I play a certain note, the people'll feel what I'm thinking

about when I'm playing it. If I'm thinking 'bout love, they'll feel the love.' It's the same with Coltrane, and he was dedicating his music to God."

"There may be other musicians," King continues, cleaning his glasses, "who can get in that anointed space where the Holy Spirit takes over. But see, Coltrane begins with that intent. He said, '*Let us sing all songs to God.*' So it's direct. He don't take you 'round the block three or four times like some of them cabbies in New York. You'll get there, man; but they gonna take you this way and that way, it's gonna cost you more, and you *might* be late. And we can't afford to be late at the pearly gates—you understand what I'm sayin', we got to be *on time*. So you take the direct flight to the heart of God with John Coltrane."

Throughout the '70s, the church followed Coltrane's lead of searching for truth through Eastern religion. For a while, they studied the ancient Indian texts, the Vedas, with the hornsman's widow, Alice. "We were seeing John Coltrane as an avatar in the Hindu tradition—a manifestation of God. We even saw him as '*Gonna Gonna Nilla, ye di Nonda Nau,*' or '*Beautiful Blue Black Mind, Enchanting Player of the Flute*'—you know, like [his 1957 album] *Blue Train*, *Blue Krishna*."

Although still accepting the validity of other faiths, in 1980 the church took a step toward religious formalization. King traveled to Chicago to study under Archbishop G.D. Hinkson of the African Orthodox Church, the spiritual arm of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. In 1982 the archbishop consecrated Franzo Wayne King as a bishop. Since the African Orthodox Church is a part of

"WE LIKE TO SAY THAT COLTRANE WENT TO HELL WHILE HE WAS USING HEROIN."



the Eastern Catholic Church, tracing its tradition back to St. Peter the Apostle in 38 A.D., the newly consecrated Church of St. John Coltrane had some strict tenets to uphold. No more talk, for example, of Coltrane being an avatar. According to the orthodox, there's been only one earthly manifestation of God—same initials, but he wasn't a saxophonist.

"So John Coltrane took on the formal name of Saint," King reasons, apparently untroubled by the transition. "A lot of people feel that we demoted him at that point."

The door opens, and Sister Mary Deborah steps into the room. Holding up her right index finger, she greets us with the words "One mind." Hers is the husky, easy-flowing voice that "spreads Coltrane consciousness" every Tuesday afternoon on the church's radio broadcast, *Uplift* (89.5 FM, KPOO).

"The sound waves go into the atmosphere," Sister Mary Deborah says with a smile. "And we feel that, by playing the music over the air, we're keeping the planet on its axis. Keeping the tidal waves from just washing us all away."

While the church members no longer hold Coltrane to be a deity himself, the 30 local "core members" are required to listen to *A Love Supreme* at least three times a day, and recite the prayer in its liner notes at least twice. "It's like having a mediator," says Sister Mary Deborah, her eyes widening. "Maybe there's something that cannot be expressed in words, or where words are limited. The music works as a vehicle to carry our prayers to God."

I hear some noise and look out the window. A group of homeless people are lining up at a long table in the courtyard. Besides offering free counseling, music lessons, and skills training (graphics, computers, CPR/first aid), the church—which receives no government support, relying on funds "through the grace of God"—gives away clothing and serves three hot meals a week.

"John Coltrane's life makes him peculiar to a certain group of people," says King. "People that have certain adversities to overcome. People that have been victims of society. People who're growing up in areas where you're subject to be offered some dope before you are a bowl of Wheaties, you know what I mean? You look up and find that you're just defeated by life itself. John Coltrane's life testimony is liberating to these folks."

In 1957, the year of his "spiritual awakening," Coltrane began his own personal ascension—a quest for perfection, in his life and his music, that's the basis for the reverence he inspires. And after all, what is religion but a quest for perfection, a search for the highest truth?

"You have to keep on examining everything that's around you—in music and in life." This quote is taken from a little blue church-published pamphlet called *John Coltrane Speaks*. Another of the entries states: "I don't know what I'm looking for, something that hasn't been played before. I don't know what it is. I know I'll have that feeling when I get it."

Coltrane went on to form his famous quartet—with McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass, and

Elvin Jones on drums—and stretch the boundaries of what anyone thought possible in jazz music. And it's his searching that so distinguishes the sound. He would solo for 45 minutes without stopping. Constantly running through scales. Repeating phrases. Elevating. Building his songs into something new. Working toward something just beyond his reach.

And Coltrane did work. Never satisfied, continually engaged in a struggle for improvement, he would practice 10-12 hours a day. "I've got to keep experimenting," he'd say. "I'm just beginning. I have part of what I'm looking for in my grasp, not all." Practiced in his bedroom. Practiced between sets at his own shows. He was always searching for that elusive sound, that impossible, perfect tone. Some say that's what killed him.

"Coltrane played sax twelve hours a day," says ♣, another artist consumed by his music and his relationship with God. "Can you imagine a spirit that would drive a body that hard?"

Spiritual warfare, King calls it. And you definitely gotta work. After five hours of jazz, gospel, and scripture, Bishop King delivers an impassioned sermon detailing the devil's temptation of Christ. The congregation stands, arms outstretched, jumping up and down, shouting "Amen" after every phrase.

"Beloved," says the bishop, clapping his hands and pacing across the floor, "I think we've got a victory today. Satan didn't want us down here clapping and singing and praising the Lord on Sunday. You know, in the Sixties, someone said that God is dead." He pauses and wipes the sweat off his face with a rag. "But Saint John Coltrane came to tell us that God is *so alive!*" ♣

DIN," SAYS BISHOP KING. "BUT HE CAME BACK WITH THE KEYS TO HEAVEN."



VIBEFASHION

Dark denim
buttonfront shirt
by J&ans Dolce &
Gabbani; indigo
long-sleeve
buttonfront
Western shirt by
Aix Armani
Exchange

*kabuki
and
blue
jeans*

Photographs by Karina Taira.

Styling by Derick Procope



Rugged Raw denim
overall by Karl Kani,
white cotton ribbed tank
by Calvin Klein
Underwear, Shelltoe
sneaker by Adidas

Light blue turtleneck
by J&S Dolce &
Gabbana, 201 XX Jean
by Levi's Vintage
Clothing Line; tailored
Western shirt by Levi's
Vintage Clothing Line,
loose fit five-pocket
jean in dark rinse
indigo by Polo Jeans,
slides by Adidas





Cowgirl stretch
shirt in flexi indigo
and Sexy stretch jean
in comfort indigo,
both by Todd
Oldham Jeans

Navy cotton long-sleeve T-shirt by
J&S Dolce & Gabbana, men's dark
jeans with painted
panels by Evisu, navy
sneakers by Puma





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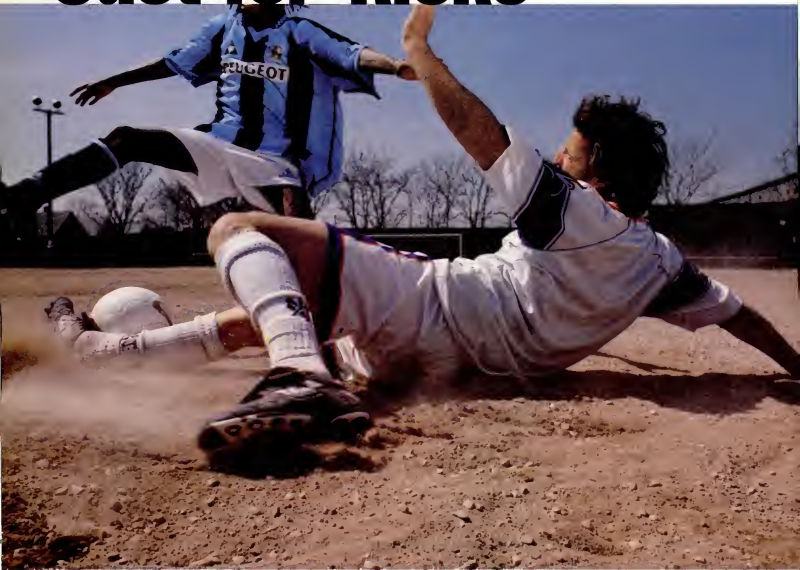
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Just for Kicks



Sportswear designers have taken a cue from the bright colors of West Indian and European soccer jerseys. Photographs by Jerome Albertini. Styling by Derick Procope

Opposite:

Chad Johnson, a former NFL player, is seen in a black and white photograph. He is wearing a black and white striped shirt and a black jacket. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression.

Black, white, and black integrity II, short, and white integrity II, all by Reebok, soccer cleats by le coq sportif, soccer ball by Nike.

Right:

University of Illinois, University of Illinois, by Nike.







Orange Relay poncho
and orange Relay V-neck,
both by PNB Nation



From left: Yellow and blue striped Rosario Central Team Replica shirt by le coq sportif, yellow Re-run track pant by Enyce; blue and white Legacy Jersey by Reebok, navy track pant (sold as part of a tracksuit) by Phat Farm; black and white Club short-sleeve jersey and white micro-satin short, both by Nike; green and black University Jersey by Nike, navy World Class running pant by PNB Nation; soccer ball by Reebok



THE **Stylist**

DESIGNER FASHION

COMPETITION
DESIGN PRINCIPLE
FROM PROSTATE
A JERRY ALTMAN

Nautica by David Chu

Not getting blown away by the latest trends has helped Nautica by David Chu become a solid force in '90s fashion. Best known for its sporty Competition line, the 14-year-old company has expanded with tailored men's and women's clothing, a Marine Denim line, Nautica Boys, watches, three fragrances, and a new Home collection. Smart and savvy, Nautica debuted its new performance footwear by signing basketball player Glen Rice of the Charlotte Hornets to a multimillion-dollar deal. Nautica, which is available at fine department stores nationwide, clearly understands the importance of being sensible and fast on your feet.

EPG



The Scoop

The latest trend in fashion seems to be celebrity designers. First, there's the Michael Jordan Collection, a new line of cotton briefs and sport boxers produced by Hanes. Magic Mike's not alone, though. Shaquille O'Neal's active sportswear, T.W. Is M., is on the streets and uses positive teen role models to promote its credo, The World Is Mine. Then there's 11 Blocks, an entertainment merchandise company headed by Willie and Mika Turner, which is producing the late Notorious B.I.G.'s line (designed before his death), Brooklyn Mint; the Fugees' two new projects—4 Star Collection, a high-end line, and Refugee Camp, casual sportswear; CrazySexyCool, featuring modern lingerie by TLC; and an as-yet-untitled clothing line by Queensbridge rapper Nas. Finally, Iron Mike Tyson is collaborating with designer April Walker of Walker Wear to create Team Tyson, a sportswear line....In short: Look for watches from Emporio Armani by Fossil; Diesel's fragrance; Todd Oldham's book, *Without Boundaries*; and the Rollerblade-sponsored Blade Jam, the world's largest in-line skating festival, which is being held in N.Y.C. and L.A. in July and August.

Stylist
DESIGNER FASHION

gear up

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VIBE ARTS

alien nation

A new breed of extraterrestrials invades Planet Earth. By Gary Dauphin

Tommy Lee Jones confronts strange creatures in *Men in Black*

Once upon a time, you could tell the intentions of a movie alien by looking at the shape of its head. Bulbous-domed creatures with bulging eyes à la 1957's *Invasion of the Saucer Men* or last year's retro *Mars Attacks!* were obviously bad news; their craniums stuffed with bursting with devious plans for world domination. In the '80s, one look at the streamlined, machinelike H. R. Giger nightmares of the *Alien* series told you that they clearly preferred eating puny humans to the complicated business of interplanetary colonization. Cute Spielbergian critters—from *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*—were yet another way of depicting aliens, their big eyes and little mouths just about cooing "I want to be your friend."

In the '90s, audiences can still decide between hiding and hugging by taking one look at an alien's grill; but the sci-fi fare now being offered is as

much about showing off new special-effects technology as it is about pulling monsters from the collective id. From the space-bug creatures in *Starship Troopers* to the killing machines in the upcoming *Alien: Resurrection*, the battle isn't so much between Us and Them but between the digital effects wizardry now sweeping Hollywood and the traditional animatronic and model effects that once set the standard in films such as *Star Wars*.

"Anything pretty much goes these days," says Steve Molen, producer of the sci-fi action comedy *Men in Black*. "So the real issue gets to be how you use the technological tools to amaze and astound audiences; show them something they haven't seen before." To this end, the makers of *MIB* enlisted the talents of both the ever-digitalized folks at Industrial Light + Magic and the mostly hands-on Cinovation, Rick Baker's makeup and mechanical-

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WHILE THE BANKHEAD
BUSTIN' THE BOUNCE
WITH DA BRAT
AND YOU STILL HAVEN'T DONE A THING UNTIL
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movies

dr. snakeskin's HOME VIDEO VIEWS

blaxploitation strikes again

When I wrote the book *That's Blaxploitation!*: *Roots of the Baadasssss* *Tude* (Rated X by an All-White Jury), I hoped it would help 1) start an explosion of '70s-centered film and funk fanzines like David Mills's exceptional *Uncut Funk* and 2) provoke video companies to release the entire range of classic black films so I would finally be able to watch *The Zombies of Sugar Hill* uncut and without any commercial interruption.

Two years after publication, I've discovered 'zines like *Backwash* (\$3 c/o Marc Hartzman, 843 Garden St., Apt. B, Hoboken, N.J., 07030), with its amusing Charles Schulz-goes-Ebonics parody "Pimpnuts"; and *Badd Maiba* at *Iters* (Midnight Media, the Barn, Upton Lodge, Hamerton Rd., Upton, Cambs, PE17 5YA, England), a digest-size encyclopedia of black action films that includes writing from *Shock Cinema's* amazing Steve Puchalski. And last year, Orion

made good by releasing 1974's blaxploitation-horror hybrid *Sugar Hill* to home video.

Twisting the familiar blaxploitation formula of hoods vs. da' hood, the story focuses on a quick brown fox named Diana "Sugar" Hill (Marki Bey), whose nightclub-owning boyfriend is killed by the mob. To reap revenge, Sugar consults Hoodoo-Mama Jefferson (Zara Cully). Taking no shorts, Hoodoo-Mama raises 18th-century slaves from the dead, who, as

bug-eyed zombie hitmen, go about slaughtering Ms. Sugar's enemies in increasingly gruesome fashion. This colorful and comic mix is highlighted by dialogue like:

Sugar Hill (robotically): Hey, Whyte! You and your punk friends killed my man.

Whyte Punk: 'Y'know, you got one of the prettiest asses in town. I'd sure hate to see it kicked in for accusin' people!

Sugar Hill: I'm not accusing you, Honk! I'm passin' sentence!

Filled with big Afros, clothing woven from fabrics not found in nature, and plenty o' dead whitey folks gettin' offed by dead black folks, *Sugar Hill* is blaxploitation at its ass-kickin' best. So now that two of my hopes are realized, you can fulfill a third: Fatten my near-empty bank account by purchasing copies of *That's Blaxploitation!* for you and all your peeps. As the good Reverend Jesse might say: Keep the 'tude alive!

star maps

FOX SEARCHLIGHT

With its bizarre premise, wildly dysfunctional family, and transgressive sexiness, *Star Maps* is a buzz-creating first feature for Puerto Rican director Miguel Arteta. The story follows second-generation Chicano Carlos (played with brooding intensity by Douglas Spain) through L.A., where he sells maps to the stars' homes for his deprived father, only to find out the business is a front for pansexual prostitution. An Anglo actress falls for Carlos and offers him a part in a TV show for being her little brown sex machine. Arteta exploits this scenario with Almodovaresque wit and pathos, but the movie's



Douglas Spain

dark melodrama backfires at times. While *Star Maps* is meant to be a jokey metaphor for the masochism required to become a star, Carlos and his family's surreal quest for the American dream sometimes comes off as degrading and unfunny. Ed Morales

love serenade

MIRAMAX

The wicked Australian comedy *Love Serenade* will no doubt have sold fans from Down Under running to Uptown Manhattan record bins in search of the Barry White ditty of the same name. From the opening credits to the last frame, White's let-me-undress-you growl empowers a somewhat corny plot about a lily-

white radio DJ, Ken Sherry, who moves into the lily-white Aussie boondocks



Radio Ga-Ga

and shakes up the lives of his lily-white next-door neighbors, sisters Vicki-Ann and Dimity, by boning them both. The not-so-smooth operator gets his comeuppance in a bizarre, Monty Pythonesque ending that pushes this film too far over the top. Betcha by golly wow, though, that Barry ain't complaining about the airline. Deborah Gregory

nothing to lose

TOUCHSTONE PICTURES

Like every big-budget interracial comedy these days, *Nothing to Lose* is as formulaic as a can of Similac: white guy and black guy meet, butt heads, and crack wise about rhythm, dialect, or dick size before white guy saves black guy saves white guy saves.... What saves this film from itself is the peculiar chemistry between Martin Lawrence (as the robber) and Tim Robbins (as his yuppie victim). After one of the most hilarious fight scenes in recent memory, the two become reluctant partners in crime, with



Robbins, Lawrence

Lawrence schooling Robbins on how to handle women and jack moves. Despite bungling his Ebonics lessons (yelling "Freeze sucker bitch!" during one stickup), Robbins turns out to be a credit to his race, and to this film, which proves something nonnursing newboms have known for years: Formula can be fun. Carter Harris

gabbeh

NEW YORKER FILMS

Like everything else in this film, a 132 is at once two things. Literally, it's a special carpet woven by the women of a vanishing non-magic tribe. Mythically, it's



Magic moment

the film's main character—a beautiful tribeswoman who magically arises from a gabbeh and spins a tale about her desperate yearning for a mysterious horseman. Gabbeh receives her father's permission to marry the equestrian, who follows her tribe from afar, but family obligations—births, death, work—continually delay their union.

Originally intended as a documentary about a tribe of weavers in southeastern Iran, director Moshen Makhmalbaf's film strikes an interesting balance between cultural reportage—those are real shots of sheepshearing and wool-dyeing—and magic realism. Though its romantic denouement is somewhat anticlimactic, *Gabbeh* is a colorful and heartbreaking love story. Petra E. Lewis



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tv

**live from n.y.—it's blacks
on *saturday night***

cast members reflect on race and the 22-year-old show

It's showtime at *Saturday Night Live's* renowned Studio 8-H in N.Y.C.'s Rockefeller Center, and the made-in-mainstream-America sketches are cranking along predictably until two-thirds of the way into the show. Using a Kente cloth backdrop, SNL's black contingent, Tracy Morgan and Tim Meadows, flavoring a skit in which *Perspectives'* nonlistening talk show host, Lionel Osborne (Meadows), badgers a '90s baseball star, Jermaine Allensworth (Morgan), with inquiries about his "teammate" Jackie Robinson (never played with Robinson, 'cuz he explodes).



Since its inception in 1975, *SNL* has been a playground for goofy frat boys, but it's also served as a career launching pad for eight brilliant African-American comedians. From *SNL*'s first black alumnus, Garrett Morris (1975-1980), to box-office champion Eddie Murphy (1980-1984) to edgy wunderkinds—the late Danitra Vance (1985-1986), Damon Wayans (1985-86), Chris Rock (1991-1993), and Ellen Cleghorne (1991-1995)—*SNL*'s black cast members have left a cultural impression on the show as indelible as that of their white comic counterparts.



Meadows and predecessors Murphy and Wayans, has the writing skills to pay the bills. "There aren't any black writers on the show, but I've been writing my own stuff since my days on the *Uptown Comedy Club*. I'm gonna get my laughs."

According to Ellen Cleghorne, there are frustrations involved in being a minority on the show. "There was one black writer, and he was writing for everybody. [SNL execs] were, like, 'We don't need you to write for white people, we need you to write for the black people.' I thought segregation was over." But the SNL association can jump-start a black comic's career in 90 minutes. Murphy's has been the most successful; Morris too has enjoyed a fruitful TV on the *Jamie Foxx Show*, while Rock received O comedy speed, *Bring the Pain*, and his latest best thing that happened to my career," starred in a short-lived self-titled sitcom, in 1995.

"To this day, people stop and ask how you doin', girl!"

Deborah Gregory

shoot:
B.I.G.
Tribute
text and
photos by
Minva Oh

A sunny Harlem block is buzzing with energy from the throngs of giddy kids, celebrities, and camera crews as Sean "Puffy" Combs directs his newest Bad Boys, the Lox, on the set of their video debut, "We'll Always Love Big Poppa."

Solemnity envelops Combs and crew as they relive the feelings that inspired their tribute to the late Notorious B.I.G. Combs moves through the set observantly and determinedly, giving all the talent careful direction. As the shoot wraps "round midnight, Lox's emotionally drained Styles says, "It means a lot to us that they played this song at Big's funeral, and that Big's moms, his wife, and his fans have heard it and know that we cared."



the dukes of hazzard

Bo, Luke, and Daisy Duke and their inbred-looking pal Cooter have been "sippin' 'shine and raisin' hell in reruns since 1996, proving that you just can't keep a good ol' boy down. (Note: The sexual tension between Bo, Luke, and "cousin" Daisy is hard to ignore.) Bo and Luke never mean any harm, but Boss Hogg and his stupid minion, Sheriff Rosco P. Coltrane, won't let 'em live in peace; so the boys are often forced into high-speed chases that end with Rosco's cruiser upside down in a swamp and the *General Lee* burning rubber and spitting dust down a loose-dirt country road. Yeeeee-hah! Those troubled by the fact that the boys' car is named after the most famous general of the Confederacy should remember that, in Hazzard County, colored people were all but nonexistent. Which suggests an idea for a *Very Special Reunion Episode*: Bo, Luke, and Uncle Jesse welcome home Daisy's long-lost brother, David Duke. *Jeff Yang*



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great-looking head of hair.

The Zion Baptist Gospel Choir
Roswell, GA
1996 Olympic Torch Relay Performers



Great hair can't have flakes.

word

sonia roars

Poet Sonia Sanchez, age 62, negotiates Philadelphia traffic in her Jeep while pumping the Fugees. She's always been real. While many of her peers who set off the Black Power movement in the '60s were unable to maintain their commitment in the face of materialism, Sanchez has managed to flow with the times without having to give

up her social conscience. Her writing has explored issues ranging from race, through which she found her voice as a poet, to the interior world of human suffering and

transcendence. And in all her words, Sanchez grabs your heart.

In her latest work, *Does Your House Have Lions?* (Beacon), it is her own heart she bears to tell the story of the brother she lost to AIDS. Poignant, and honest, *Lions* speaks of familial acceptance and reconciliation in the face of this scourge, and breaks the silence that often surrounds the subjects of homosexuality and AIDS in the black community. "I go to a lot of schools, and I listen to the comments people make about it being just a gay disease," says Sanchez. "But people have been gay since the beginning of time, and AIDS wasn't here. You have to begin to think about how it surfaced all of a sudden."

Sanchez currently teaches in the English department at Temple University and remains deeply committed to the art of poetry. "It's the greatest genre on Planet Earth," she says. She credits hip hop in particular for helping keep poetry alive, but adds: "Unfortunately, rappers don't get the props they deserve for doing so."

Julia Chance



woman-child

The paperback publication of *Mama's Girl* (Riverhead Books) by Veronica Chambers allows us the opportunity to revisit this touching autobiography. As a double Dutch-jumping little girl, *Glamour* contributing editor Chambers simultaneously craved attention and struggled for independence from her distant Panamanian mom. What she learns is that there is nothing better than being a black girl, protected, and strong. Chambers recounts the honest, and often brutal, details of her Brooklyn upbringing—including her physically abusive father—and all the while, her fast-rising ambition never loses steam. In the end, Chambers triumphs. She makes peace with her past, and we learn from her example of healing.

Kweli I. Wright

latina generations

The heartfelt hopes, pending prayers, and delayed dreams of three genera-



tions of impressed yet suffering Cuban-American women drench the text of *The Chin Kias King* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). Ana Veciana-Suarez vividly conjures up images used in the folk religion Santos and poignantly details the dramatic events in three characters' lifetimes. Cucca is the great-grandmother who looks to her traditional spirit world for guidance. Cucca's daughter, Adela, is a gambling manizer. And Adela's daughter, Maribel, who is abandoned by her husband soon after giving birth to a handicapped son, is forced to discover the strength that sustains a mother's love throughout time—in this life or the next. *The Chin Kias King* is a timeless, captivating story.

Cristina Verdin

pugilist portraits

Boxing (powerHouse Books), a dramatic set of pictures by respected art photographer Larry Fink, has all the ingredients of an urban epic. At center ring stands the boxer, but orbiting around him is a web of various men—trainers, promoters, cronies, and boxing fans—whose presence contributes to the operatic character of the sport.

Fink depicts a deeply sensual noir vision of the boxing world. His black-and-white photographs display a vigorous range of compositions comparable to the elaborate multiracial cast that populates the book. All the players are captured as if on a stage, framed in the glare and shadow of Fink's camera. Will, nobility, defeat, bruised glamour, showmanship, and hard mathematical discipline are all



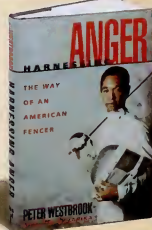
glimpes in this dazzling, earthy collection.

George Pitts

sword power

Harnessing Anger: The Way of an American Fencer (Seven Stories/Cool Grove Publishing) is a compact autobiography by six-time Olympian and 13-time U.S. saber champion Peter Westbrook. Like his younger Afro-American counterpart Tiger Woods, Westbrook, a 45-year-old Newark native and son of an African-American father and a Japanese mother, smashed through the racial stereotypes of a white sport, paving the way for others to follow. With sincerity and simplicity, Westbrook discusses achieving the discipline needed for his sport, embracing his biracial identity, and setting up his fencing foundation in New York City. Like a real-life version of one of the swashbuckling Musketeers, Westbrook—and his tale—sweeps in at the right time.

Eugene Holley Jr.



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tech

don't be camera shy

Professional photographers will still be using 35mm film five years from now, but it'll seem as quaint and cumbersome as using a 4x5 camera today; we are now in the age of digital technology.

Digital cameras are already preferable to 35mm when there's a competitive edge to be had—whether that's getting a photo of late-breaking news published or being the first to transmit images from a remote location. They allow you to view, edit, and send images instantly, without the processing time film requires.

Some of the best digital cameras on the market are those in Canon's EOS-DCS series. These cameras have replaced the standard hinged back cover on the EOS-1N 35mm camera with a digital back cover that contains a "charged coupler device" (a kind of digital sponge that stores photographic information for you to send down the wire), manufactured in cooperation with Kodak.

But as can be with new technology, prices are prohibitive. For example, sports photographers use the high-speed, \$16,000 EOS-DCS3c, whereas portrait photographers prefer the high-resolution \$28,995 EOS-DCS1c. At the other end of the price spectrum, however, Canon has two "point and shoot" digital cameras, the PowerShot 600 camera (\$949) and the PowerShot 350 (\$649).

Surprisingly, it's the older Nikon N90s, and not the Nikon F3, that offers the only real competition, but EOS beats it in nearly every performance area. Plus, choosing a camera often means developing a brand loyalty, and because Canon has more extras, such as an EF 17-35mm f2.8 L lens, consumers are likely to stay with it. (The industry buzz has Canon already planning improvements to the EOS-DCS, such as a vertical grip, a second shutter-release button, and a removable power supply.)

Digital cameras offer many great advantages over 35mm film and represent the future of photography—a flick through *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Sports Illustrated* will confirm this—but they won't completely replace the older technology. However, antimodem, film allows shooters to connect with photography's tradition of craftsmanship in ways that logging pixels around a screen cannot: rather like there are those who prefer the intimacy of a handwritten letter to the expediency of e-mail.

Terrence James



see you, see me

Do you wish you were in the middle of things, the life and soul of a party? Well, now you can be with Image Technology's affordable (\$34.95) 3Dfx camera. Just find a crowd, strike a



pose, and say, "Cheese is nice." The camera's matched spheric lenses and built-in flash can make you stand out from the crowd—literally.

Capturing the image from different perspectives through its three lenses, the camera creates the illusion of 3D by printing the left- and right-eye views onto a "lenticular print material," which ensures the left eye sees only left-eye views, and the right eye sees only right-eye views. Your brain then merges these into a single 3D image (no silly glasses required). As for printing, Image Technology got around this little problem by creating the 3D Printer/Processor and shipping it out for use by major photographic retailers such as Ritz, MotoPhoto, and Qualex. So now, go find that party.

Chiedo Nkwocha

between you and me...

Next time you talk on your cell, keep it brief, because a person with a cheap scanner can now intercept your conversations. Cellular phones that use analog technology are only partially protected by the pin number, whereas digital PCS (Personal Communication Service) technology forces eavesdroppers to rethink.

See, in addition to offering better voice quality and, in some models, e-mail, digital phones are also supposed to be 100 percent secure. But earlier this year, experts at the



University of California at Berkeley discovered that the new security measures weren't so secure after all, and that some digital encryptions could be intercepted.

So far, the only digital phone that's been able to stump the hackers is the Omnipoint PCS by Omnipoint Communications (about \$249 a unit / \$9.99 for monthly service). The reason? Omnipoint uses a stronger type of digital encryption called GSM, which is standard outside the U.S. So next time you're trying to cut a long-distance deal, make sure you're using the right phone—or else your business might become the talk of the town.

Gregg Bishop

the digital punoBrepun

what's got it going on in multimedia

Scary monsters: Comic-book hitman *Scud: The Disposable Assassin* joins the list of quirky heroes to have his own computer game (on Sega Saturn). Featuring characters from the graphic novel by Rob Schrab, *Scud* is a shoot-'em-up with an edge: Homeboy has to kill to stay alive. Get used to this antihero: Oliver Stone recently signed on to make an animated *Scud* feature....**The Graduates:** FastWEB (<http://www.fastweb.com>) has set up a database that links up students with more than 100,000 financial awards. Using personal profiles, FastWEB zips the information around until matches are made for the cash-strapped applicant to approach. So, think twice before allowing finances to deter you from going to college....**Need for speed?** Forget video-racing games—check the real thing with *Super Speedway*, a racing documentary filmed in IMAX 15/70. From the opening scene featuring a chicken the size of a car, the IMAX technique (using film that is three times the size of the deluxe 70mm) impresses, and expert camerawork convinces you that you're actually driving an Indy 500 race car. Buckle up.

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ev 3 Vogue



THE NEW ALBUM FEATURING **WHATEVER** AND THE #1 HIT **DON'T LET GO (LOVE)**

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ev 3

ON EASTWEST RECORDS, AMERICA COMPACT DISCS AND CASSETTES

REVOLUTIONS

A black and white photograph of a man, likely Wyclef Jean, sitting on a metal folding chair. He is wearing a white suit and a black fedora. He is looking back over his right shoulder towards the camera. The background is a textured, light-colored wall.

WYCLEF JEAN
WYCLEF JEAN PRESENTS
THE CARNIVAL COLUMBIA
BY CHRISTIAN EX

There's Wyclef Jean onstage with the Fugees doing the Jimi Hendrix thing: his wet tongue caressing guitar strings as the instrument coarsely whines out the national anthem.

Clef runs through the routine with rehearsed verve before throttling the device by the neck and smashing it to smithereens. The crowd eats it up. Much more calculated than Jimi's effort, 'Clef's version lacks virility because it's been done before at, like, every other Fugees show. And besides, this is the MTV Awards during the last days, not Woodstock during Vietnam. Lacking Hendrix's psychedelic punch, 'Clef's rendition comes off as the act that it is—all icing and no cake, all rage and no protest.

But let's wrestle with the real demons at hand here. The seeds of our critical love/hate affair with the Fugees began way before that night. Probably around the time when the figures for their record sales became indiscernible from the amount of McDonald's burgers sold, when they appeared on their zillionth magazine cover, or when "Killing Me Softly" caught every rotation on TV and radio dials. Sure, the Fugees became critical darlings with the release of their masterfully executed sophomore set, *The Score*; but, hey, fans like to root for the underdog. Become successful and we hate you.

So, what to do with *Wyclef Jean Presents the Carnival*, the solo offering from the Fugees' leading man? Well, if you've had it up to here with the three-man crew, you forcibly render your eyes and eardrums useless for the next 16 months or so, because the album is succinctly beyond phat and will be,

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208 Mobb Deep
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well, any and everywhere music is appreciated. The rest of you, love it now. You're sure to hate it soon enough if the radio doesn't let go of "We Trying to Stay Alive," "Clef's recapitulation of the Bee Gees' "Staying Alive."

As an orator, Wyclef is alternately hallucinogenic, abstract, and facetious, slipping into a quirky, mad scientist role with unnerving ease. But he never lets the listener, or himself, forget that his zaniness is only a musical manifestation—a role to be kept within a certain context. Thus, *The Carnival* keeps things realer than they have been in years. "I remember coming from Haiti, growing up in Brooklyn / On Flatbush got my first sneakers tooken," he recalls on "Year of the Dragon," with his ghetto curriculum vitae lushly backed by Lauryn Hill: "Yellow cheese bus / Gettin' beatings if I cuss / Law away another day in stripe Lees and Le Tigres / Rocked the leather bomber / Momma tried to strip / Paranoid 'cause this boy around my neighborhood got shot."

"Gone 'Til November," a moving stand-by-my-side ballad replete with orchestral violin slidings, explores how brothers take to the lucrative lands known simply as outstate to make ends meet ("Every time I make a run / Girl you turn around and cry / I ask myself, why, oh why? / See, you must understand, I can't work a 9 to 5 / So I'll be gone 'til November"). On "To All the Girls," this son of a preacher man wrestles with personal demons, including bouts of adultery during a short-lived marriage. And the makeover of the Cuban folk staple "Guantanamera" features the airy and throaty vocals of Celia Cruz, the Queen of Afro-Cuban music, alongside chest-rattling bass drops and teetering piano chords.

It's in the latter portion of the project, however, that Wyclef proves how compelling an artist he can truly be. Backed by an acoustic guitar and nyabingi drums, he belts out a redemption song on "Gun Powder" and then proceeds to turn out

As an orator, Wyclef is alternately hallucinogenic, abstract, and facetious, slipping into a quirky, mad scientist role with unnerving ease.

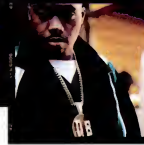
the Creole numbers that round out *The Carnival*—"Sang Fezi," a rousing account of Haitian pride and triumph through adversity; "Jaspora," a roots-rock harangue of Haitian expatriates; and "Yele," a renunciation of his homeland's social injustices that touches parameters established by Bob Dylan. Even the varying kompas of "Carnival" featuring Sweet Mickey (the self-proclaimed Haitian Eddie Murphy) and Jacob and Jocelyn of Kassav, Martinique's premier zouk band, will leave you in jaw-opened awe of Wyclef's all-encompassing view of hip hop.

Produced almost entirely by Wyclef and Jerry Duplessis, who shared production credits on all but three of *The Score*'s selections, *The Carnival* rates above most contemporary discs by being an actual body of compositions, not just a collection of songs. If *The Score* was the Fugees' retaliatory answer to a Hip Hop Nation that wrote them off too soon after their unsettling 1994 debut, *Blunted on Reality*, *The Carnival* is "Clef wiggling his Haitian butt on a world stage and subliminally explaining his Hendrix fixation. As Hendrix revolutionized rock 'n' roll by recultivating its original blues ethic in a new field of electricity, Wyclef emulates Hendrix's music theory by layering Caribbean music styles over hip hop's volatile swagger, using his own guitar techniques to diversify and contextualize his tunes.

The Carnival is every bit as exciting and liberating as the grand affair from which it derives its name. We've been crying for this album to be made, especially as hip hop continues to lose steam as the international voice of social and political commentary we so staunchly purport it to be. Just don't hate it when it blows up.



THE POETRY



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JoJo, K-Ci



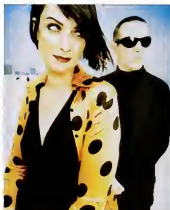
K-CI & JOJO ‘LOVE ALWAYS’ MCA

As one half of the wild-boy R&B quartet Jodeci, K-Ci and JoJo Hailey have always been on soul’s cutting edge. Yet no matter how popular the Haileys were within the supergroup, all eyes ultimately seemed to focus on the charismatic allure of resident genius DeVante Swing—it was easy for the other members to get lost in the sauce. With the release of their first album, *Love Always*, K-Ci and JoJo come roaring forth from the shadows.

After opening with the ache of “Last Night Letter,” a slow jam for those heart-broken evenings, the boys pile on the sorrow with the woeful “Baby Come Back.” Sounding like his words might be directed at former flame Mary J. Blige (“I was a fool to let you go / I let you walk right out my door / It was a bad mistake I made, and I regret it to this day”), K-Ci wails like a man driven crazy by his missteps.

Working with a crew of relatively unknown producers, the Haileys have discovered some masterful talents for *Love Always*, most notably Rory Bennett, who plays all the instruments except guitar on the seductive “Don’t Rush (Take Love Slowly).” Cowritten with JoJo, the song features lines, such as “there’s time to make love and a time to play,” that overflow with tenderness, soothing like orchestral bubble baths. Tragically, however, the disc’s first single, “You Bring Me Up,” delivers generic, flavorless funk despite its slick production. Same story with the Babyface-penned track “How Many Times,” which uses corny acoustic guitar à la Tony Rich.

The crowning glory on *Love Always* is the retro/doo-wop deftness of “Still Waiting,” brought to life via DeVante’s production. Borrowing from Prince (although not a remake of his 1979 song) and Tin Pan Alley, K-Ci and JoJo sound like the sons of Frankie Lymon. Forget yesteryear—*Love Always* is a marvelous musical testament to black love in the ‘90s. *Michael A. Gonzales*



SWING OUT SISTER ‘SHAPES AND PATTERNS’ MERCURY

As the U.K. steadily gains the Most Favored Nation for New Music status, veteran British groups are coming back strong. Attempting to ride that wave is Swing Out Sister, best known for their 1987 hit “Breakout.” Their latest album, *Shapes and Patterns*, again combines singer Corinne Drewery’s fluid vocals with Andy Cornell’s airy arrangements. The results are pleasant but underwhelming.

The ballad “Now You’re Not Here” is one of the better tracks; but songs like “Better Make It Better” sound like that goosy stuff the Carpenters used to sing, minus the sincerity. *Shapes and Patterns* demonstrates that, sometimes, having all the right ingredients still doesn’t make the recipe. *Andréa M. Duncan*

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CRAIG MACK 'OPERATION: GET DOWN'

STREET LIFE RECORDS/ALL AMERICAN MUSIC

A stooped/ferocious jam leaves an indelible imprint on your dome: Years later, you can hum the tune word for word, even when you can't recall where you left those damn car keys. Craig Mack dropped such a bomb with 1994's "Flava in Ya Ear," which lit up the sky up like Hale-Bopp, laying the cornerstone for Sean "Puffy" Combs' indomitable Bad Boy Entertainment. Mack reminded us why we love hip hop in the first place: dope rhymes and slick metaphors; flipped-wig delivery over earthquake beats. Now,



after being out of the limelight because of disputes with his former fam, he confronts the most dreaded phase of a career in rap: the Sophomore Album.

On *Operation: Get Down*, Mack takes pains to shed his Bad Boy scowl. He accentuates the positive with party jams, sex vs. love diversions, and missives about the consequences of street life. Problem is, he and his producers seem to be going through the motions instead of shooting for another groundbreaking personal statement like *Project: Funk da World*. The chunky loops and beats that buoyed his rubbery style have largely been supplanted by lightweight pop-song samples and R&B vocal hooks. Fine for smoothies like Heavy and L.L., but Craig's beefy, drunken lyrics threaten to collapse these tracks like bricks through wet toilet paper.

Ironically, the most successful joints are those that recall Mack's Bad Boy days: "Today's Forecast" and "Jockin' My Style." The strongest of the new-style productions is "Do You See," a cautionary tale decrying ghetto nihilism. But the rest of *Operation: Get Down* lacks Mack's boom, energy, and gritty enthusiasm. This may be a moot point, since remixes now make good albums practically unnecessary, but it certainly underscores Puffy's reputation as perhaps the best producer (of debut albums anyway) in the business. *Darrell M. McNeill*

BACKSTREET BOYS 'BACKSTREET BOYS'

JIVE

The Backstreet Boys can carry a tune, but there's nothing original to be found on their U.S. debut album. Slang-heavy songs like "We Got It Goin' On" and "Get Down (You're the One for Me)" are just the latest examples of rappers' using cheap catchphrases to get a quick hit. Even when the album is momentarily salvaged by the pleading harmonies of "I'll Never Break Your Heart," you have to ask: How can a quintet go wrong with an "I'm so faithful" ballad? Their apple-pie image helped them remain at the top of the

European charts throughout 1996, but it sounds like the Backstreet Boys are really just some new kids on popular music's block. *Nikkei Duncan*



billy lawrence
paradise
featuring "Come On" with MC Lyte
and "Paradise"

On her new album, Billy brings real romance and artistry back to R&B with eleven sensuous gems. Ten co-written by Billy, that are beautiful to hear and meaningful to listen to.

In stores
June 24

Produced by Mike Ross, Dave Robinson and Jeffrey "Jame" Shaw for Interdimensional, Organized Noise Productions, Daniel "Daddy" Alaraby, George Rogers, Raheem Smith

Executive Producers: Mike and Jane for Interdimensional, Billy Lawrence and Mike Ross

On *Paradise* Billy Lawrence covered every style — a caustic, 1977 Burt Bacharach thing, a fusion of reggae, funk and soul, a hip-hop jam.



PATTI LABELLE 'FLAME' MCA

Some of us grew up on Patti LaBelle. Not '80s grew-up-on, as in witnessed her massive voice on the FM dial from time to time (not to mention her massive hair in video) and really dug "On My Own." I'm talking *grew up* on Patti, as in Mommy occasionally believed she was Lady Marmalade herself—never missed a concert, has the same great legs. In my household, there are entire imaginary scenarios involving Patti coming to graduations, frying up some wings, getting down with the rest of us.

For the heads that know little of the Bluebells, LaBelle, and Patti pre-nose job, Lady LaBelle has, over the past 10 years, thrust herself from the rather insular world of authentic R&B into the mega-universe of soul/pop. This move toward a broader audience came about for obvious reasons. (No, not money, silly. *For the attention.*) So bright was Patti's star that she simply wanted to offer those who had missed out a little light. Ultimately, true fans and true fam sat patiently through "hits" like "New Attitude."

With *Flame*, her latest album, Patti offers mostly huge, dramatic ballads (which will be just fine by my devoted mother). However, the relaxed, Sunday afternoon feel of "Be Your Lady," produced by Jam and Lewis, offers a promising new direction for Patti. More classic are "If the Shoe Was on the Other Foot" (coproduced by Gerald Levert and Edwin "Tony" Nicholas) and "Addicted to You," both containing the hopeful storytelling Patti's music is known for. This project shows Patti's maturation in the pop genre—a more natural, more equitable marriage between them and us. *Flame's* not perfect, but at this point we love Patti for more than just her albums: We love her 'cause she's family.

Kierna Mayo

STEVE WINWOOD 'JUNCTION SEVEN' VIRGIN

Steve Winwood, like (early) Elton John and Daryl Hall, is one of the few white male singers who can emulate soul without tritely trying to sound black. Which is why Winwood's latest release, a flavorfully rich masala of R&B and classic rock, wafts so enjoyably into listeners' ears. "Spy in the House of Love" and "Let Your Love Come Down" supply some of the catchiest hooks around, while the Chic-ly transformed cover of Sly Stone's "Family Affair" (with Nile Rodgers on rhythm guitar) is more celebratory than the original. *Junction Seven* is a whimsical testament to blue-eyed—or in Winwood's case, brown-eyed—soul.

Omoranke Idowu



NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Thank you for boarding B.I.N.A.—Blackspot International Nigger Airlines. Our flight will depart from Underground International Airport in London, England and arrive at Ballers' International Airport in San Francisco, Calif. Please extinguish all blunts, and the groping of flight attendants is strictly prohibited.

Eastward, you'll see Brixton, London crew *Bad Breed*—such hardcores that if you asked them for a spot of tea, they just might give you a royal ass-kickin'. The five-man crew consists of box-cutter-sharp MCs Schemer, Pelo, Beano, Siegel, and high-calorie beat miner Lokey.

Although it's trendy to sound American in U.K. hip hop, on *Bad Breed's* self-titled, 10-song demo, they let off with a full-blown British/Caribbean accent. On the beef-ridden "War Ting," Schemer riffs, "It's a war ting / The guns coking / Fuck the talking / If you're in the streets that I'm stalking." While their gritty, sublevel thuggery can be likened to Mobb Deep's, they're not "infamous" clones; rather, they're street-news anchorman reporting stories from the ghetto trenches. To get the latest news, call Schemer at 011-44-956-582-993.

As we continue our flight over the Atlantic, you will see Brooklyn, N.Y. Here, a verbally enriched duo called the *Doxmen* are raising hell with their two-song demo. For the duration of the tape, Magnetic and Dumar trade flows that oppose today's popular hardcore MC, dropping science instead of bodies. Inspired by the Five Percent doctrine, Magnetic rhymes: "Ruffinicks, go 'head and bust your calibers / I be busting anthemic, geometry, and algebra." Their first release, "Magnetic Attract," features a sample from the Stylistics' old-school hit "People Make the World Go Round" and more metaphor mathematics.

The second track, "Spontaneous Combustion," produced by Dumar, James Azor (Refugee Camp), and newcomer Mark Richardson, is set off with a kazoo-sounding sample that paves the way for a hip hop 'n'otic drum pattern. Like the hook from Gang Starr's "DWYCK," the Doxmen wreck the mike like a pimp pimps ho's. Any interested labels should call 718-468-0570 to get magnetized.

We are now about to touch down at San Francisco's Ballers International Airport. If this is your first visit, check out the group *Bored Stiff*.

know that Big Shawn, Mynt, Equip, Priz, P. Whaley, Kwanz, and T.D., the producer, aren't on that gangster sign-language tip. These low-key rap revolutionaries bring more than typical gangster Stepin Fetchit lyrics over cat-caught-in-a-blender beats.

Although their style isn't as verbally complex as Ras Kass's or Casual's, Bored Stiff create their own borderline-alternative category. "Too many artists want to entertain / To get some fame and get a name / So we remain pawns in the game," P. Whaley breaks down on the pro-independent label anthem "Soil," from their four-song EP *Timeless*, produced by Time's Creations and Stiff Productions. The album should be out in stores, but hit Hella Records on the jack at 415-334-1387 for more information. Also, stay tuned for the album *Sounds Like My Life*.

THE BEATNUTS 'STONE CRAZY' RELATIVITY



Psycho Leg, Juh

Much to the delight of submainstream fans who have been quietly anticipating their third offering, the Beatnuts return—now trimmed to a duo—with more of the same psychopathic hardcore. These Corona, Queens—bred die-hard broths are hitachi

hot on selections like “Off the Books” and “Do You Believe?”, and they even humorously lick the ‘80s R&B bowl by jacking Patrice Rushen’s “Forget Me Not” for “Give Me the Ass.” When pulling out your wacknifying glass, you’ll find no traces of slack production anywhere on *Stone Crazy*. If exaggerated violence and sex is your choice of background music, the Beatnuts do it the right way.

The Blackspot



THE PSYCHO REALM THE PSYCHO REALM PUFFHOUSE/COLUMBIA

The Psycho Realm represent the *unificación* of Cypress Hill’s B-Real with two *vatos simpáticos* in a modern-day Western epic, loco style. Laced in both fiction and fact, B’s nasal intonations play against the stalwart bluster of his Spanglish-accented compadres, while addressing issues of street drama (“Psycho City Blocks”), romantic bust-ups (“Love from the Sick Side”), soul-sucking chemical dependency (“Confession of a Drug Addict”), and even a Dungeons & Dragons-style poetic freak-out (“R.U. Experienced”). Introspective lyrics and the group’s self-produced moody, melodic loops make the Psycho Realm a place of pure Buddha-blessed imagination.

Dorothy Stefanski



3X KRAZY STACKIN CHIPS NOO TRYBE

It’s embarrassing that 3 X Krazy don’t know their retro style is played out. They must not realize that raunchy, N.W.A.-like subjects are not shocking anymore. Titles such as “Keep It on the Real” and “Next Niggas Ho” clue us in that lyric substance is unfortunate.

namely their last concern (that’s if their name didn’t tip you off). But at least the Oakland-flavored beats are tight, making excellent background music for deep discussion on what will keep hip hop itself from going crazy.

Malik R. Singleton

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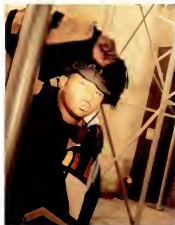
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MAD LION 'GHETTO GOLD & PLATINUM RESPECT' NERVOUS RECORDS

Mad Lion, who claims to own "hip hop-reggae," fails to provide listeners with any reason why these two genres should be brought together in the first place. Once again, he teams up with producer/mentor KRS-One. The result is an unevenful sophomore album that drags on with lackluster, uninspired lyrics. The one bright spot on *Ghetto Gold...* is the R&B-flavored "You Got It Coming," featuring

soul prince Gerald Levert, who coos "Ecstasy next to me tends to be glory" over a soft, mellow track. Lion may want platinum respect, but paper-thin props is about all he's gonna get.

Kenneth Terry Miles

BEN HARPER 'THE WILL TO LIVE' VIRGIN

Ben Harper is a black musician who, like Lenny Kravitz, Tracy Chapman, Vernon Reid, and the towering Jimi Hendrix, reclaims blues forms—specifically rock and folk, black music that's been held hostage so long, many think it was always "white." *The Will to Live* is Harper's crunchy, acoustic, and occasionally amplified follow-up to 1995's *Fight for Your Mind* and his stunning 1994 debut, *Welcome to the Cruel World*. He and his band, the Innocent Criminals, passionately continue to seek the honesty of the blues on tracks such as the jumpy "Homeless Child," with its recorded-inside-of-an-empty-refrigerator-carton acoustics, and "Jah Work," a passionate reggae/ragga blur.

The supreme irony, though, is that while Harper is connecting to the sad, doleful vein of black history in a very direct way on songs like "Jah" and "Homeless," he has already been relegated to something being deemed as *alternative soul*. Thusly, you'd have a better chance of simultaneously winning the presidential election and the lottery while being struck by lightning than of hearing the very deserving "I Want to Be Ready" on today's frustratingly crappy black radio.

Harry Allen

DEGREE 'DEGREE' V.P. RECORDS



Riddima still rule, sex still sells, and dancehall—reggae's catchy, up-tempo offshoot—is still trendy in the retro '90s. Wineas Degree's highly ambitious, self-titled, largely self-produced, and digitally clean third effort. Fifteen tracks of the former *General's* amusing banter may prove a bit much for purists (Degree confirms: "A just the girls dem inna da ring, what a ting / Dem have man eyes dazzling"), but younger heads will feel the single "Limited Edition," featuring the boardwork of Steely and Cleve; the mento-driven ditty "Spark Plug"; and, of

course, the raunchy, Richie Stephens-produced "Who Badda," which bounces with Lady Saw.

Sharon Gordon

BOOM SHOTS

Here's an idea: Instead of expecting reggae rhymeringers to spark us with their endless attempts at "opera style" (which hasn't been fresh since Brooklyn's own Screechy Dan pioneered it way back in 1980-sup'm), why not tune into the efforts of actual *singers*? For most of reggae's 35-year history, the singer was the musical main course, while the deejay's syllables served merely as seasoning. But during the late 1980s, "reggae rappers" took top billing, while vocalists were cast as mere setup men. In recent years, though, crooners like Sanchez, Luciano, Beres Hammond, Wayne Wonder, and Singing Melody have been running the dance again. All of a sudden, we're blessed with a wealth of heartfelt harmonizers ready to sweet up the sunny season.

Marcia Griffiths *Land of Love* (Germaine Music)

I'm going out on a limb here, but Marcia's always been my favorite I-Three. Before joining Bob Marley's legendary backing triumvirate, Griffiths had had a healthy solo career on the strength of such Studio One gems as "Feel Like Jumping" and "Really Together." And with the exception of the Club Med anthem "Electric Boogie," she's been keeping dancehalls hot through the 1990s with bombshells such as "Fire Burning," for Donovan Germaine's label. Her latest full-length release

features a soaring cover of the Heptones classic "Land of Love" and of the righteous posse cut "Stepping Into Zion," which joins Marcia's noble tones with Beenie, Buji, Tony Rebel, and Cobra. Also worth a spin is *Heads of Government*, Germaine's new album from the Mighty Diamonds, who sound smoother than ever on his digital riddim tracks.

Benji Myaz *Intimate Relationship* (VP Records)

The man earned his stripes as a bass player and did his time on Jamaica's north coast hotel circuit. But at last year's Sunsplash, he took the stage in a white button-down shirt and poured out his heart. His rich baritone ignites sensitive ballads like "Don't Ask My

Neighbor" and "Love You Higher," proving that he can *swing* with the best R&B or reggae vocalists. Myaz also wrote and produced the lion's share of his impressive debut album.

Rayvon *Hear My Cry* (Virgin)

This young veteran has toured all over the world with Shaggy and has added his silky vocal stylings to boombastic hits like "Big Up," "Nice and Lovely," and "Summertime." In 1994 he teamed up with Funkmaster Flex and Frankie Cutlass to score the hit "No Guns No Murders," a breakbeat-driven party record that showcased Rayvon's rhyming style. **After a decade and better nicing up nightspots around the New York area, Shaggy's sparring partner is finally making international his charismatic style.** *Hear My Cry* is an album of many moods, from the spiritual title track (which Rayvon describes as "a prayer") to "Party Vibe," with its KC and the Sunshine Band sample, to the raw libido of "Stallion Ride."

4 By 4 (Mesa/Blumoon)

Besides boasting a stellar lineup of topflight reggae vocalists—Coco Tea, Freddie McGregor, Michael Rose (formerly of Black Uhuru), and Bunny Rugs (of Third World)—*4 By 4* also showcases the slick production of Mikey Bennett, who's been cranking out high-caliber material for years. Two of the featured artists also have new albums of their own: Rose's explosive *Dab Wicked* (Heartbeat), produced by U.K. riddim acts Mafia and Fluxy, and Coco Tea's highly anticipated album on Motown. The four artists share nearly a century of experience between them, and their star wattage has only grown brighter over time.



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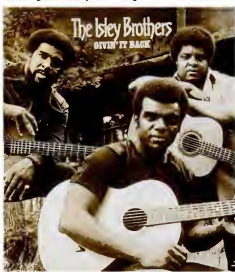
THE ISLEY BROTHERS 'THE BROTHERS: ISLEY' 'GET INTO SOMETHING' 'GIVIN' IT BACK' 'BROTHER, BROTHER, BROTHER'

SONY LEGACY

Ask Nikki Giovanni and she'll tell you the Isley Brothers were beautiful, talented, and loved *way* before they became big and famous. And she should know: She grew up with

them in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the liner notes that accompany *Brother, Brother, Brother*, the last of four albums in Sony Legacy's recently released series of Isley reissues, Giovanni fondly remembers: "I was home and it was Mother's Day at church, and their Grandmother wanted to sing a tribute. She was still doing that Isley 'Shout' at ninety-two."

Indeed, brothers Ronald, O'Kelly, Rudolph, Ernie, and Marvin Isley and their brother-in-law Chris Jasper are some



back-home boys who've got that *my-Grandma-loves-'em* kind of longevity on lock-down. It's the joyful noise the Isleys make that these rereleases celebrate so effortlessly.

The Brothers: Isley (1969) heralds the beginning of the Isleys' ol' slap-your-momma funk, in which Ronald's perfectly pitched screeches bounce off Marvin's thudding bass. When the other brothers add their harmonies to Ronald's sure-footed vocals on songs like the woeful "I Got to Get Myself Together," it's so perfectly uplifting, a crackhead might swear off the yayo after a listen.

Through the tumultuous times of Vietnam and the civil rights movement, the Isleys kept their music funky but still spoke their minds. They challenged folks on the title track to *Get Into Something* (also from 1969) and demanded their people's inalienable rights on that same album's gospel-infused anthem "Freedom." Their tortured covers of Neil Young's "Ohio" and Jimi Hendrix's "Machine Gun" on 1971's *Givin' It Back* express gut-wrenching anguish over the tragic killings at Kent State, even as they ask the Lord's forgiveness for the assailants.

"Work to Do," "Pop That Thang," and "Lay-Away" were the head-nodding Cadillac pumpers on 1972's *Brother, Brother, Brother*. Isaac Hayes and Al Green must have listened to the Isleys' pitiful lamentations on "Love Put Me on the Corner." The signature vocal howls, Ernie's aching guitar strokes, and Jasper's churchy organ notes gave—and continue to give—these tracks life and energy as timeless as their architects.

Isley Brothers connoisseurs know that most of the 34 R&B and pop tunes included in this series are absolute must-haves. Isley music always pulls on your emotions, and like teeth on a naked nipple, it hurts so good. Let these brothers slide you back 25 years. There's a sweet soulful sound that leaves your spirit electrified and your insides throbbing.

Joyce E. Davis



Taj Mahal 'SENIOR BLUES'

PRIVATE MUSIC

We've heard all the tired dismissals before: "The blues is dead....It's too country....It's some ol' negro shit....No relevance to today's youth....only white boys play the blues," yadda yadda yadda. No relevance, huh? Check blues-hip hoppers Goodie Mob. White boys, you say? What about Keb' Mo' and Robert Cray? Old negro shit? Buddy Guy and R.L. Burnside want to school you proper. The blues is *not* dead—not as long as Taj Mahal is in the building.

With the fervor of a true visionary, master guitarist/griot Taj Mahal has mined the deep blue mother lode that courses through the great Gibraltar rocks of jazz, reggae, calypso, R&B, country honk, New Orleans second line, samba, and cumbia for almost four decades, creating a music that makes flesh the vibrant socio-political-cultural *gestalt* that is the African diaspora.

With his new long player, *Senior Blues*, Mahal refurbishes yet another room in the big house we call blues. A masterful mélange of inspired cover tunes and originals that weave a musical tapestry of chiming guitars, raucous piano, Memphis/New Orleans horn charts, Caribbean grooves, jazzy soul, percussive polyrhythms, and Taj's blacktrap-molasses-over-buck-wheat-cakes vocals, *Senior Blues* is world music in its most democratic sense.

CHANGING FACES' *ALL DAY, ALL NIGHT*

BIG BEAT/ATLANTIC



CHRISTOPHER CHANGING FACES

At first nothing stands out on *All Day, All Night*, Changing Faces' second release, but soon you'll warm up to radio-ready concoctions like "I Got Somebody Else" and "All That"—the kind of R&B tracks you hear when you get to the club too early. Wronged women everywhere will instantly take to the kick 'em-to-the-curb lyrics of the hit single "G.H.E.T.T.O.U.T. Part II": "Get o-u-t... 'cause I can do bad all by myself." The unnecessary remake of Cyndi Lauper's 1983 "Time After Time," though, does no more than throw old lyrics over some 808 beats. And even with a guest spot by blazing lyricist Jay-Z, this R. Kelly-assisted album is still just an exercise in musical mediocrity.

Joyce E. Davis



JOHN J. MURPHY

REVOLUTIONS
BEATIFICATIONS

The title tune's bluesy, vamping vocal burn ("He's tall and good-looking / And he just knows what to say") on Horace Silver's original bop sets the tone, and the rest of the album never lets up. *Senior Blues* gleefully rolls through the sprightly cakewalk of "Queen Bee" to the double-time, Holy Roller wake-up call of "Oh Lord, Things Are Getting Crazy" to the second-line dance of Hank Williams's "Mind Your Own Business." Taj Mahal is working some serious 20th-century hoodoo-man swing here. Forget what you heard. The blues is alive and catchin' wreck.

Tom Terrell

From the streets of North Philadelphia with a shared passion for soaring harmonies and classic rhythm and blues.... comes the self-titled debut release from VOICES OF THEORY.



Includes the debut single "Somehow" featuring Mona Lisa and Kurupt (Tha Dogg Pound)

plus the infectious "Say It" and "Wherever You Go."



PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN J. MURPHY



Executive Producer: Jellybean Benitez



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ROY HARGROVE'S CRISOL 'HABANA' VERVE

Roy Hargrove's ninth release, *Habana*, is the trumpeter's first journey into Latin jazz as a leader. His 11-piece band of American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban musicians builds momentum with Latin percussion, and crowns it with a four-piece horn section. Of *Habana*'s 10 tracks, pianist Chucho



Valdes's compositions "Mr. Bruce" and "Mambo for Roy" have the most flamboyant sound. Even though Hargrove's three originals ("Dream Traveler," "Ballad for the Children," and "The Mountings") are relatively rapid, his explorations into the genre revolutionized by his one-time mentor, Dizzy Gillespie, have enhanced his own evolution as a musician. That alone makes *Habana* worth purchasing.

OJ Lima

VARIOUS ARTISTS 'SO SO DEF BASS ALL-STAR VOL. II'

The Hip Hop Nation once looked at bass music as some tainted, hick mutation of rap—the soundtrack to those raunchy, outlandish videos we alternately loved and hated. But to all rogue musics there eventually comes a legitimizer, an established musician who takes the form under his wing and makes it into something the mainstream can digest. For bass, that legitimizer is Jermaine Dupri and his *So So Def Bass All-Stars* compilations.

Heralded by the success of last summer's hit single "My Boo," by Ghost Town DJ's, *Bass All-Stars Vol. I* introduced bass to its most skeptical audiences, the West and East Coasts, and managed to win them both over. This year, Dupri's team has returned with *Vol. II* and a more sophisticated and elegant side to the music that even the Atlanta shawties aren't used to.

The 13 tracks take a variety of approaches. "Bass," "East Side to da West Side," and "Booty Time" (by King Edward) featuring Poon Daddy and Lil' Jon, King Edward, and Zae featuring Sonji, respectively), which are laced with party lyrics any Yankee would swear he could write in his sleep, give the average bass head more of the thumping boom over a repetitive drum track. While listening to these cuts, it's not hard to envision excessive bumping and grinding on an Orlando dance floor. They're interwoven with new sounds that are far more complex and far less scandalous than conventional bass: more musical than mechanical.

"Let Me Luv U Down" is a smoothed-out dance remake of the classic by Ready for the World. "Apple Pie" is this year's "My Boo," a bubblegum ballad that bounces nicely on the car radio. But the best track by far is "Es Verano," in which bass goes international, with Latina vocalist Corina singing about the joys of frolicking in the summertime.

All in all, *Bass All-Stars Vol. II* represents the past, present, and future of bass. Whether you hear this one in the deck or on the dance floor, you're sure to come across something you weren't expecting.

Kenji Jasper



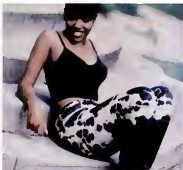
REVOLUTIONS
BEFORE
NOVOLUTION

ERICKA YANCEY 'ERICKA' RCA RECORDS

Grand Rapids, Mich. native Ericka Yancey can sing her ass off, which is exactly what she does on her spirited debut. Ericka's angelic voice, a hybrid of Whitney Houston's and Toni Braxton's, caresses notes with a subtle, sweet sensuality rarely heard from young R&B singers nowadays.

She blesses listeners with mainly mid-tempo grooves and sultry ballads, such as the slow and sexy "I Like" and the fiery "U Can't Miss (W.U.N.H.)." Although a couple of faster songs like the hip hop-inspired "So Good" are thrown in for diversion, Ericka offers a chance to slow your roll with a smooth LP.

Charlie R. Braxton



DAVE GILBERT

THE O'JAYS 'LOVE YOU TO TEARS'

GLOBAL SOUL RECORDS/VOLCANO ENTERTAINMENT

It's been a good 40 years since the legendary O'Jays first brought us their timelessly soulful sounds, and a good while since their last album, 1993's tender *Heartbreaker*. But on their latest, *Love You to Tears*, the O'Jays have one thing on their minds—booty. Okay, first they'd like to shower you with diamonds and pearls and talk a good game about commitment. But, like love maestro Barry White, the O'Jays have always walked a fine line between setting the mood for lovemaking and getting into some plain ol' butt-naked sex.

While Walter Williams's mellow tenor puts you in a sentimental mood, Eddie Levert's gravelly baritone entices like a vocal striptease, beckoning you, like Teddy Pendergrass, to "come here, woman." Throughout *Love You to Tears*, Levert, Williams, and newest member Eric Grant show how the O'Jays have mastered the art of seduction, and bring back to R&B the touch of class that has been lost on the majority of up-and-coming acts, save for a few souls like Boyz II Men and Dru Hill.

On the bluesy, tongue-in-cheek "Pay the Bills," Levert thanks the Lord "for bringing this person to me / Sending an angel like you did," but ponders "How in the hell I'm gonna pay the bills?" For the soaring title ballad, the O'Jays uncover the spectrum of black love. "I Want My Cake" explores the dilemma many commitment-phobic men find themselves



Eric, Eddie, Walter

DAVE GILBERT

in, while the album's first single, "What's Stopping You From Loving Me," offers the opposite scenario, telling the tale of a woman "who must be sneaking, still out there creepin'."

Production points come courtesy of Gerald Levert and Edwin "Tony" Nicholas, whose hip hop-inspired production on the buttery "Turned Out" enhances without overpowering. The forever beggin' Keith Sweat scores as well, coproducing and lending background vocals to "Baby You Know." *Love You to Tears* proves, without a doubt, that the O'Jays can still hang—and get the draws.

Tracy E. Hopkins

VIBE 153

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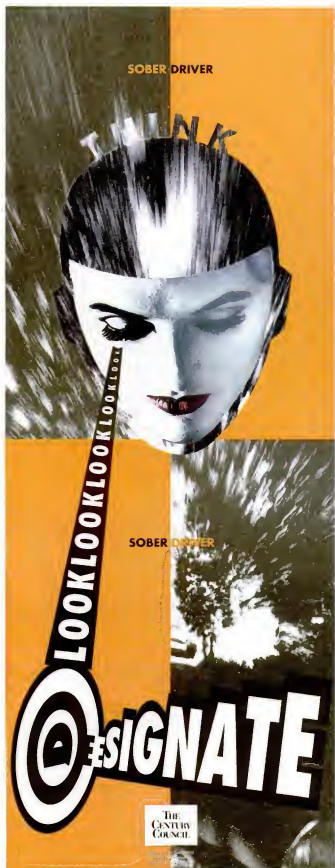
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ADINA HOWARD 'WELCOME TO FANTASY ISLAND' ELEKTRA



When you're a sexually liberated sista like Adina Howard, erecting a scale on which to balance your acute holike tendencies and your astute, self-styled feminism is difficult. To some, her less-than-orgasmic debut, *Do You Wanna Ride?*, birthed Miss Howard (if you're nasty) as a poster model for sexual freedom—she's in charge of her punany. Others, however, dis her for helping affirm the "promiscuous black woman" stereotype. One is left to ponder whether that diametrical dynamic may have accounted for Adina's less-ribald

tone on her new album, *Welcome to Fantasy Island*.

For her second effort, Adina doesn't discard her "Freak Like Me" straight talk, but now it seems less titillating. "Just take your time / Tonight you're mine / Gonna tum around / Hit it from behind," from the organ-punctuated highlight "T-shirt & Panties," isn't as exciting in the wake of "take it in the butt" sentiments from Lil' Kim. Head-bobbing (ahem) ballads like the N8 and Kiehl-produced "Personal Freak" and "Sexual Needs," with contrapuntal beats mixed by Timbaland, don't come (ahem) as erotic as, say, Madonna's oral sex ode "Where Life Begins." (In fact, Madonna took backshots five years ago on *Erotica*.)

Like an album-length version of the Isley Brothers' booty-call classic "Between the Sheets," *Welcome to Fantasy Island* offers tracks that are smooth enough to soothe the take-charge woman. Adina's cover of Vanity 6's "Nasty Girl" is a climactic moment, better than her G-funkified duet last year with Warren G on Tina Turner's "What's Love Got to Do With It." And "Could've Got Away" is a pumpin' summertime tale about Adina getting pulled over by the fuzz.

So even though Adina ain't as wild as she once purported to be, freakiness is in the mind. Like, it ain't the size of the sail, it's the motion of the ocean. And whether Adina is seen as a skeezer or some kind of sexy feminist, *Welcome to Fantasy Island* never stops moving. *Miles Marshall Lewis*

VOICES OF THEORY 'VOICES OF THEORY' H.O.L.A. RECORDINGS



It seems like today's stampede of would-be rhythm and blues and rap fusioners is bent on new jackin' that swing right into the ground. But the game's not over. With their first album, *Voices of Theory* rise up from the dust with a refreshing synthesis of genres. Suave vocals over jazzy piano stylings on "Get Down" put you in the mood; "It's Been a While" is a shining tribute to that certain ex-love you can't forget; while the romantic vulnerability of "Say It" recalls the days before the "R" in R&B came to stand for "raunch." This is a seductive debut from hardrocks who're man enough to show they care.

Cristina Verón

Q20 QUESTIONS

1. In L.L. Cool J's Gap commercial, how many of y'all noticed his quick shout-out rhyme "For us by us / on the low" and that he was wearing a FUBU cap?

2. Since Dennis Rodman is suggesting that he might change his name, can't you just hear the announcer at Chicago's United Center: "Now, starting for the Bulls at power forward, from South-eastern Oklahoma State, number ninety-one, *Orgasm!*" 3. After reviewing Lady Saw's pinup calendar, we ask: Why was her blond 'do giving us—a lil' too late—Mary J. Blige and Faith? 4. Can you believe that the upcoming B.B. King—duets album matches the Master with everyone from D'Angelo to the Rolling Stones? 5. Wasn't the Arsenio Hall/Vivica Fox show duller than a pre-Tiger Woods golf match? 6. Speaking of Woods, did anybody check how, when the golf champ put on that Kelly Green Master's tournament championship blazer over his black pants and red Nike sweatshirt, he was truly representing? 7. But, um, "Cabinasian"? 8. With the

da...)? 12. Could it be true that Lenny and Squiggy (from *Laverne and Shirley* fame) are models for Wu-Wear gear? They're gonna do it their way, yes, their way. Makin' their dreams come true...

13. Now that baldies are fading, why does every fashion designer have to have a dreadhead in their ads? 14. Upon hearing the news that Rebbie "Centipede" Jackson is putting out a new album, we'd like to know: *Is she well?* 15. Yeah, B-Rock & the Bizz's song "MyBabyDaddy" is funny, but should we really be laughing about the dismantling of the black family? 16. Why does KRS-One subtly dis Puffery on one version of "Step Into a World (Rapture's Delight)," then turn around and have him do the song's remix?



L.L. Cool J.



Erick Sermon



Parrish Smith

advent of Ellen's coming out, you have to wonder: In the *Pleasant* comic strip, what exactly was the nature of Peppermint Patty's relationship with Marcie? 9. When did smoking cigars become cool again? 10. When are artists going to cease and desist with all the tired skits, intros, and nonmusical interludes on albums? You don't need to be selling us that hard—we're already listening to the damn record. 11. We know that it doubles RIAA sales certifications, but why won't artists put out one album that's completely dope instead of a double album full of fast-forward filler (e.g., Biggie, Wu-Tang, Master P, yadda, yadda, yad-

da...)? 12. Could it be true that Lenny and Squiggy (from *Laverne and Shirley* fame) are models for Wu-Wear gear? They're gonna do it their way, yes, their way. Makin' their dreams come true... 13. Now that baldies are fading, why does every fashion designer have to have a dreadhead in their ads? 14. Upon hearing the news that Rebbie "Centipede" Jackson is putting out a new album, we'd like to know: *Is she well?* 15. Yeah, B-Rock & the Bizz's song "MyBabyDaddy" is funny, but should we really be laughing about the dismantling of the black family? 16. Why does KRS-One subtly dis Puffery on one version of "Step Into a World (Rapture's Delight)," then turn around and have him do the song's remix?

Guest Kris still has his Masters in Contradiction. 17. Excusing the busted Dr. Jynx caliber, how did Converse come back from the dead with the fly kicks? 18. Doesn't Tichina Arnold realize that if she continues to act like *Martin*, so will her show? 19. Who told former *New York Undercover* actor Michael DeLorenzo that he could hold out for an exorbitant raise like the cast of *Friends*? Obviously, he doesn't have many. (Maybe he could learn a thing or two from Jerry Seinfeld.) 20. And finally, how excited are we that Parrish Smith and Erick Sermon are back in the studio working on a new EPMD record? We *gots* to chill.

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THE DETAILS

VIBEFashion: "Kabuki and Blue Jeans"

page 110

Dark denim buttonfront shirt \$170 by Jans Dolce & Gabbana available at Dolce & Gabbana New York Boutique-SOHO, Blue System, Miami, and Neiman Marcus nationwide; indigo long-sleeve buttonfront Western shirt \$68 by AIX Armani Exchange available at AIX Armani Exchange stores nationwide.

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Rugged Raw-denim overall \$104 by Karl Kani available at Macy's, Herald Square, Dr. Jay's, Brooklyn, N.Y., and LEED's Menswear, Chicago; white cotton ribbed tank \$13 by Calvin Klein Underwear available at Macy's, Bloomingdale's, and Burdines.

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Light blue turtleneck \$190 by Jans Dolce & Gabbana available at Dolce & Gabbana New York Boutique-SOHO, Blue System, Miami, and Neiman Marcus nationwide; 201 XX Jean \$160 by Levi's Vintage Clothing line available at selected Original Levi's Stores and selected retail stores nationwide; tailored Western shirt \$35 by Levi's Vintage Clothing line available at limited Original Levi's Stores and selected retailers nationwide; loose fit five-pocket jean in dark-rinsed indigo \$48 by Polo Jeans available at the Attium, Jimmy Jazz, and S&B Menswear.

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Cowgirl stretch shirt in flexu indigo \$100 and Sissy stretch jean in comfort indigo \$100, both by Todd Oldham Jeans available at Patricia Field, N.Y.C., Bill Hallman, Atlanta and N.Y.C., and Todd Oldham Stores, L.A., N.Y.C., and Miami.

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Navy cotton long-sleeve T-shirt \$50 by Jans Dolce & Gabbana available at Dolce & Gabbana New York Boutique-SOHO, Blue System, Miami, and Neiman Marcus nationwide; men's dark jeans with painted panels approximately \$270 by EVISU (for more information, call 01-44-171-734-9222).

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Women's dark jeans with painted logo approximately \$180 by EVISU (for more information, call 01-44-171-734-9222).

VIBESyle: "Just for Kicks"

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Blue striped Coventry Team Replica shirt \$60, white Bordeaux short \$40, and navy Bordeaux socks, all by le coq sportif available at Champs Sports, Planet Earth, LEED's Menswear, and Paragon; white and black Integrity Jersey \$60 and white and black Integrity II short \$35, both by Reebok (for store availability, call 800-843-4444).

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Green and black University Jersey \$38 by Nike (for store information, call 800-344-NIKE).

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Yellow and blue stripe Rosario Central Team Replica shirt \$60 by le coq sportif available at Dick & Harry and LEED's Menswear; yellow Re-run track pant \$58 by Envy available at Macy's, select stores, Fred Segal, Melrose and Santa Monica, and Nordstrom's, select stores; blue and white Legacy Jersey \$55 by Reebok (for store availability, call 800-843-4444); navy track pant (sold as part of a tracksuit) \$110 by Phat Farm available at Phat Farm, N.Y.C., Fred Segal, L.A., and Reggie Wear, Miami, Fla.; black and white Club short-sleeve jersey \$40 and white micro-satin short \$35, both by Nike (for store information, call 800-344-NIKE); green and black University Jersey \$38 by Nike (for store information, call 800-344-NIKE); navy World Class running pant \$80 by PNB National available at Uncle Ralph's, Brooklyn, N.Y., and Clark Clothing, Evergreen Park, IL.

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Orange Relay poncho \$80 by PNB National available at Spikes Joint, Brooklyn, N.Y., and True, San Francisco, Calif.; orange Relay V-neck \$52 by PNB National available at USA Boutique, Philadelphia, PA, and Cricket West, Columbus, Ohio.

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| 0092 Chubb | 7090 Dr. Dre |
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After the riots, bullets, and civil rights battles of '60s America, the national spirit desperately needed uplifting. Tragic visionaries like Marvin Gaye and Sly Stone were dropping black-soul science on the ears of the masses; but in 1976, a group of Bronx musicians set off a rhythm revolution on the dance floors of darkened nightclubs.

"We never thought of ourselves as 'disco,'" says guitarist Nile Rodgers, who, along with bassist Bernard Edwards and drummer Tony Thompson, formed the core of the band known as Chic. "As a guitarist, I was into

Jimi Hendrix; as a person, the Black Panthers; so I just wanted to make music that felt like revolution."

During the decade-defining disco craze, Chic created strobe-light anthems like 1978's "Le Freak" and "Good Times" (1979) for a generation in transition—musically and politically. "We were trying to build a bridge," explains Rodgers, "between the ghetto and pop music—an R&B dance band with a jazzy rock vibe."

Their bridge spanned quite a gap. Bernard's bass riffs would become the foundation for the next generation of sound, from Brit-pop to hip

hop. "[Queen bassist] John Deacon was sitting right next to me when 'Good Times' was recorded," says Nile. While Deacon lifted the bass line for his group's massive "Another One Bites the Dust," the Sugarhill Gang sampled the entire instrumental track and brought a whole new art form into public consciousness.

"The first time I heard 'Rapper's Delight' was in a New York club called Leviticus," recalls Nile. "I was, like, *what the fuck is this?*" (A lawsuit was eventually settled out of court.)

Like all good parties, though, Chic

came to an end. "The folks screaming 'disco sucks' had won," says Nile of the group's 1983 breakup. "But they never understood what Chic was all about anyway."

During the cash-and-carry 1980s, members of Chic produced platinum pop for artists ranging from Diana Ross to Madonna. And last year, sadly, Bernard Edwards succumbed to pneumonia. But the power of movement caught in the grooves of Chic will always be looped in the Studio 54 of our minds. The record spins, the disco ball glitters, and the night lasts forever.

Michael A. Gonzales

PROPS

From left: Bernard Edwards, Alfa Anderson, Tony Thompson, Luci Martin, Nile Rodgers, circa 1979

CHIC!



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